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ABSTRACT

This document contains the four issues of Northwest Education published from fall 1999 through summer 2000. Issue themes are: (1) "Sea Change: Meeting the Challenge of Schoolwide Reform" (Fall 1999); (2) "City Kids: What Helps Them Thrive" (Winter 1999); (3) "The New Principal" (Spring 2000); and (4) "Growing Great Teachers: Professional Development that Works" (Summer 2000). Each issue contains a lead article summarizing current research and issues related to the theme followed by articles describing outstanding schools, practices, and educators in the Northwest. Issues also include information on related resources, book reviews, commentary by practitioners, and letters from readers. (SV)

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Northwest Education, 1999-2000

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NW EDUCATION

FALL 1999

SEA CHANGE

Meeting the Challenge of Schoolwide Reform

NORTHWEST REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY

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NW EDUCATION
VOLUME 5 NUMBER 1
FALL 1999

ON THE COVER:
"Ship of Dreams" is the title of this whimsical mural recently unveiled at Bridlemile Elementary School in Portland, Oregon. "It was so exciting watching the excitement and enthusiasm of the kids as they worked on this amazing project," says parent Victoria Vining Gillman who, with parent Nan Waller, co-chaired the mural's development. With funding from the Regional Arts Council, Run for the Arts, and the Multnomah County Commission on Children and Families, the school's 500 students spent a year designing and creating the mosaic under the direction of Artist-in-Residence Lynn Takata.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GARY WILSON

Sea Change
Meeting the Challenge of Schoolwide Reform

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Pooling resources for the good of the whole requires able leadership and ample esprit de corps.

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A RISING TIDE

The notion of a "sea change" neatly captures the spirit of schoolwide reform. The movement could in fact, borrow Webster's definition of sea change ("a marked change: transformation") to signal its rejection of isolated reforms—ones that focus on this or that population, this or that aspect of schooling. Such approaches have come to be disparaged as "tinkering" around the edges or "piecemeal" strategies whose effects are limited, at best.

Schoolwide reform, which has gathered momentum in recent years, washes across all the islands of need and resources, reshaping them at the same time it blends them into a unified whole. If nothing looks the same afterward, that's as it should be, reformers say. To turn around low-performing, high-poverty schools, change must be deep. And it must be complete.

Schoolwide reform builds on the idea (to use another ocean metaphor) that "a rising tide lifts all boats." Poor kids, immigrant kids, migrant kids, Indian kids—disadvantaged kids of every kind—do better in an inclusive setting with high standards for all. Pulling students out for basic skills or remedial drills is becoming a relic of another era. Today, policymakers want to see all children challenged in the regular classroom, engaged in meaningful work that makes them think and reason. Intensive learning in small groups has a place in the new model. But it must be linked to the broader curriculum and tied to tougher standards.

In a 1994 speech, Mary Jean LeTendre of the U.S. Department of Education called upon the idealism of educators to raise the boats of all American children. "The schoolwide option is about having a dream and sharing the vision," said LeTendre, chief of compensatory education. "It's about developing a plan of how to get there, and how to make it happen, and then working together to change everything step by step over time. Think of the schoolwide option as an invitation to dream."

The 500 schoolchildren who created the mural on our cover call their image "Ship of Dreams." Into their vessel, the students put a soccer ball and a softball, a computer and a calculator, a telescope and a paintbrush, a violin and a picture book, a pencil and a globe—"basically, all the things they do," in the words of the parent who coordinated the mural project at Portland's Bridlemile Elementary School. When schools set out to reform themselves, so, too, should they put "all the things they do" on the table, schoolwide advocates say. Only then will their ship of dreams sail safely into port.

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PHOTOS BY JUDY BLANKENSHIP, JAY REITER, AND SUZIE BOSS

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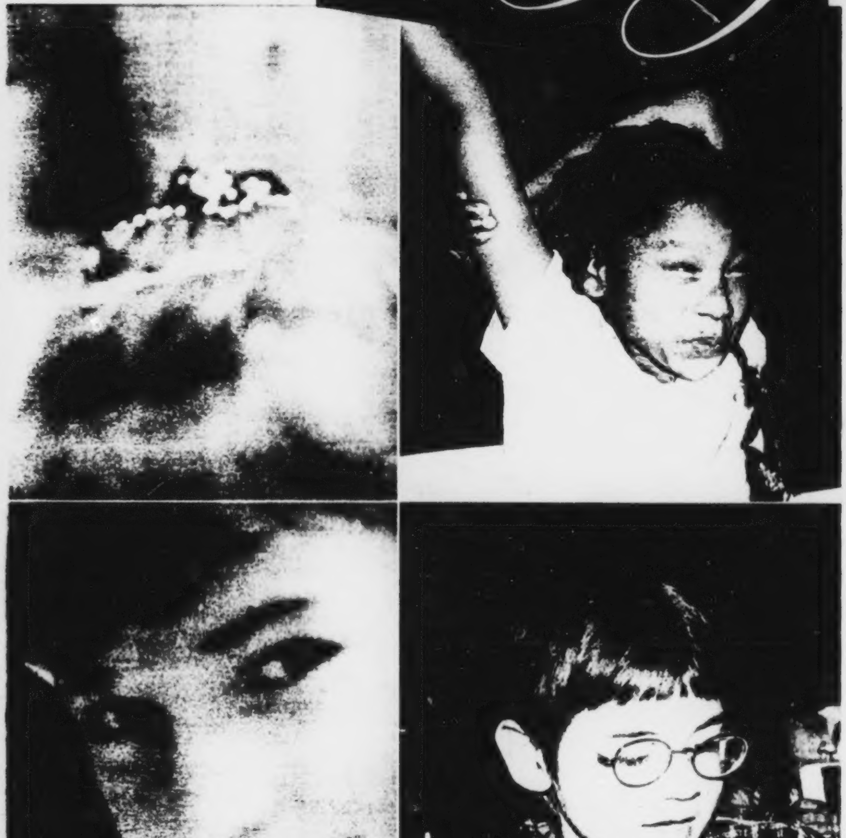
Putting It All Together



here's a paradox right at the heart of schoolwide reform, and it's this: Serving *all* students well really means serving *each* student better. In broadening the scope of reform to include all children, schools must in fact narrow their focus to the individual child. Only when every student succeeds do all students succeed.

hat's what one school in Vancouver, Washington, discovered on its way to becoming a Distinguished Title I School. With a ballooning population of Russian kids, a sizable group of Hispanic children, and a broad sprinkling of other nationalities and languages, Eleanor Roosevelt Elementary School was struggling. And diversity was only one issue. The other was poverty, affecting 80 percent of Roosevelt's students. Kids facing conflict, crisis, or chaos at home were acting out their troubles at school. Language problems, cultural problems, behavioral problems—it was, in the words of Principal Marianne Thompson, "the whole ball of wax."

ith so much need, it only made sense to abandon targeted assistance and embrace a schoolwide approach. The guiding question for Roosevelt's staff as they began planning a schoolwide program was, "How do we bring this really diverse group of kids together holistically?" Thompson reports.

he staff spent the next year scrutinizing every last detail of their school—from learning opportunities to behavior management to facilities issues. They pored over research findings. They did a formal needs assessment. They met in small groups that periodically

4 reported back to the whole staff. The plan that emerged centered on three central goals: (1) improving instruction in reading, writing, and math, with a focus on better alignment of support staff with instructional goals; (2) fully integrating technology into the curriculum; (3) developing a schoolwide management system that helps students make better choices. Nothing went untouched. Even the lunchroom was redesigned to boost behavior and encourage conversation among diverse groups of kids.

"It was a real mix of educational kinds of goals with really concrete operational kinds of goals," Thompson says.

Miraculously, in this rainbow of 700 poor and immigrant children, every kid now counts. Any child struggling with schoolwork or school rules eventually winds up on a list for assistance from the school's "screening team"—a committee of key school personnel who discuss the child's school and family history and devise a plan to help. That help might include referral to a human services agency, matchup with a middle school mentor, one-to-one tutoring with a staff assistant, in-class translation of lessons into a native language, or some other strategy tailored to the child's unique needs. (For more on Roosevelt Elementary's schoolwide program, see Page 32.)

Therein lies the big challenge for Roosevelt—and for other schools seeking comprehensive change. It's what Thompson calls the "fulcrum of balance" between the individual student and the school as a whole.

"The thing that we have continued to grapple with," she says, "is making sure we're accommodating the learner, but also having continuity in approach and educational goals across grade levels and programs."

In an impassioned speech to educators in 1994, Mary Jean LeTendre of the U.S. Department of Education addressed this dilemma. "Some of you have expressed concern, both privately and publicly, that the schoolwide program approach, in serving all children, takes away from the individual child," said LeTendre, who oversees educational programs for disadvantaged kids. "You have said that with a schoolwide program, you can't focus on individual needs."

Her answer? "Yes, you can, and yes, you should."

She explains the change mechanism this way: "The schoolwide focus expands the resource base for each child, reaching the most educationally disadvantaged children by immersing them in more advanced curriculum and providing them with better instruction and with more support."

TIES THAT BIND

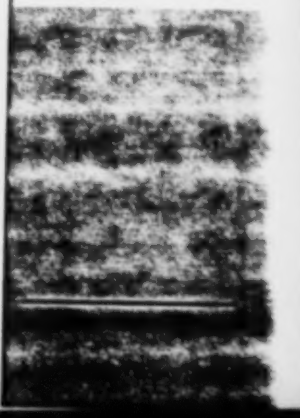
Two themes—tethering learners to broader goals, and tying discrete programs together—are central to schoolwide reform. Both themes are about making connections: connecting disadvantaged kids to the big picture of high standards and lofty learning goals; and connecting the myriad programs for needy kids to each other and to the mainstream. This emphasis on connections is a radical shift—revolutionary, some say—in the delivery of services to disadvantaged schoolchildren. The old approach to Title I (known as Chapter 1 until 1994) and the other compensatory education programs was "categorical"—that is, kids were assigned to a category of disadvantage (poor, migrant, language minority, American Indian) and were served in a separate setting, often cut off from the rest of their classmates.

This approach, however, has been judged a failure. A national study of Title I released in 1994 painted a dismal picture. Poor children still lagged woefully far behind their more affluent peers. Describing the traditional practice of pulling kids out for drill and practice in basic skills as "flawed" and "working on the margins," the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) called for a shift toward the whole-school approach. Congress complied.

Before 1994, only schools with at least 75 percent

Catalog of
SCHOOL
REFORM
MODELS
FIRST EDITION

he Catalog of School Reform Models (1st edition) and *Addendum to the Catalog of School Reform Models*, both published in 1998 by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, together provide descriptions of 48 models of two types: entire-school models, which give schools a framework for change affecting most or all aspects of school operations; and skill- and content-based models (focusing on an areas such as reading or math) that can be used as building blocks for comprehensive school reform. When choosing a model, the catalog counsels, "the key is to thoroughly assess local needs and develop comprehensive plans that may incorporate one or more external, research-based models that provide maximum local leverage for sustained improvement in student results."



ublished in collaboration with the Education Commission of the States at the request of the U.S. Department of Education, the catalog is part of the department's effort to provide information to schools, districts, states, and others as they plan and implement comprehensive school reform programs under the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program. It is available online at www.nwrel.org/scpd/natspec/catalog.

poor students could blend money and resources to serve all kids. After the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, schools with 50 percent poor students were allowed to merge funds and programs schoolwide. Although the schoolwide approach has been around since 1978, it wasn't until the 1994 law took effect that huge numbers of schools began to grab the option. From just over 3,000 schoolwides in 1993-94, the number swelled more than fivefold in only four years—to 17,000, according to *Education Week*. That's a sizable chunk of the 22,000 eligible schools nationwide.

Already, kids appear to be benefitting from the shift. The latest national study of Title I, released this year, shows an upswing in reading and math scores in the highest-poverty schools. And more low-income students are meeting district or state standards in a number of large, urban districts.

Schools are able to make these gains, experts say, because whole-school reform replaces rigidity and fragmentation with flexibility and coordination. The OESE spells out the ways schoolwide approaches can help high-poverty schools become high-achieving schools:

- Accelerate the curriculum so it moves all students toward achieving high standards
- Encourage collaboration and planning among regular classroom teachers, administrators, specialists, and support staff
- Integrate and streamline pupil services, including diagnostic, counseling, and health services
- Increase the intensity and flexibility of instruction
- Coordinate budgets from multiple sources
- Consolidate and tailor staff development to a school's needs
- Create options for extending students' learning time by lengthening the school day or year and expanding early childhood programs
- Involve parents more centrally in planning, decisionmaking, and instructional support roles
- Encourage innovation and new ideas

"A new world has opened up for high-poverty schools" since 1994, Olatokunbo Fashola and Robert Slavin of Johns Hopkins University wrote in *Phi Delta Kappan* magazine last year. "There is no turning back to the policies of the past."

Mingling pots of money once reserved for narrow populations or choppy programs greatly enhances schools' options and opportunities. In a 1996 issue of *Improving America's Schools: A Newsletter on Issues of School Reform* published online, the OESE explains that the 1994 reauthorization "enables schoolwide programs to use all available funding sources—federal, state, and local—to reorganize a school's education program to meet the needs of its entire student body." At Eleanor Roosevelt, for instance, the well-stocked Title I Reading Room is open to everyone. Regular teachers and language-minority assistants have access, along with Title I assistants, to hundreds of titles that are conveniently cataloged online by the themes (such as "imagination," "senses," "environment," "community") that frame the school's curriculum.

In reinventing itself, Roosevelt School reformed and realigned the half-dozen vital organs of the educational organism: instruction, curriculum, classroom management, assessment, professional development, and governance. Slavin, the developer of the schoolwide reform model Success for All, emphasized the drastic nature of the schoolwide process by likening it to a "heart-lung transplant" in an interview with *Education Week* last year. Roosevelt's staff took on the huge task willingly. With strong leadership and a spirit of unity, they were prepared to stay the course. The result perfectly mirrors the profile of a good schoolwide project laid out by the Education Department, with its:

- Inclusive planning process, with an academic focus at the core of the plan

- Comprehensive, sustained professional development
- Cultural inclusiveness
- High value placed on parent and community involvement
- Use of a variety of assessment tools to focus on students' progress

Not all school staffs, however, are ready for the long-term planning and deep-seated changes schoolwide reform requires. "Strategies cannot be put in place when school administrators and/or faculty are reluctant to change, have no or little expectations that anything will happen, or are poorly managed either at the school or classroom level," notes Samuel Stringfield of Johns Hopkins University in a federal study of Title I programs.

Recognizing the administrative, pedagogical, and staffing obstacles schools face when confronted with the awesome task of remaking themselves, the Education Department recently gave them a new avenue for going schoolwide. The Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program—known in reform circles as CSRD—is a more prescriptive approach to schoolwide reform. That is, it spells out more precisely the components of a good program (see sidebar), and makes schools compete for the $150 million it's parceling out. And, while not required, prepackaged, research-based models are encouraged. These "brand-name" models like Success for All are designed, evaluated, and marketed by universities, nonprofit R&D groups, or for-profit businesses.

The big plus of CSRD is that schools aren't faced with designing a program from scratch.

"The advantages of adopting these 'off-the-shelf' instructional models are clear," write Fashola and Slavin in *Kappan*. "School staffs need not reinvent the wheel."

Typically, when a school commits to using a comprehensive model, it buys materials and training from the developer, and gets access to networks of other users. The $50,000 CSRD grants cover only some of the start-up costs, warns Elizabeth Hertling in an ERIC Digest, *Implementing Whole-School Reform*, published in July. First-year expenses, she reports, can range from a low of about $100,000 to a high hovering around the half-million dollar mark.

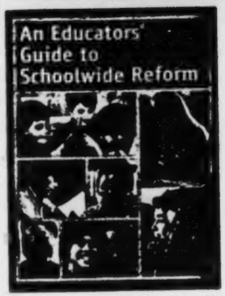
It's not cheap. Nor is it easy. Even with an off-the-shelf model, schoolwide reform is no quick fix. "What is a mistake," says Stringfield, "is to think you can buy one of them and plug it in."

A 1998 study by the RAND Corporation found that two years after adopting a whole-school model, only about half the schools studied were fully implementing the core elements of the program. Noting that brand-name packages have bagged big academic gains for some schools, Hertling sounds a note of caution. The "catch" in using external models, she says, is using them well. "The designs must be well implemented," she stresses. "That is where many schools and districts have run into problems."

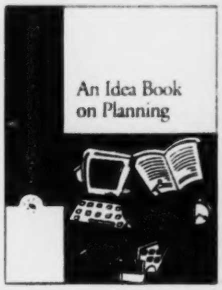
RECIPE FOR REFORM

So what do schools need to successfully transform themselves? In April, *Education Week* listed the "key ingredients in the reform recipe," based on interviews with researchers:

- The school makes a free, informed choice to select the design, based on a decision by its faculty, often through a secret ballot
- Faculty members who do not support the design can 'transfer with dignity'
- The principal and other administrators provide strong leadership at the school site
- The design is clear and specific, and the developers clearly explain how it's supposed to work
- Money and time are available for everyone in the school to participate in professional development, planning, and collaboration
- The design team provides structured materials and long-term, targeted technical assistance



n Educators' Guide to Schoolwide Reform, a 1999 study by the American Institutes for Research, examines the research backing up 24 popular reform models currently on the market. Only three models—Direct Instruction, High Schools That Work, and Success for All—got top scores for having "strong evidence of positive effects on student achievement." Other models' research support was rated as "promising," "marginal," or "mixed/weak." Copies can be ordered for $12.95 for members or $15.95 for nonmembers from the publisher, Educational Research Service, 1-800-791-9308, or from any of the sponsoring organizations (AASA, AFT, NAESP, NASSP, or NEA). The full text or a link to the full text is available on the Web sites of sponsoring organizations.



two-volume set titled *Implementing Schoolwide Programs* from the U.S. Department of Education is designed to answer the question: How can schools serving high concentrations of poor students take advantage of the opportunities available under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which was reauthorized in 1994? *Volume I: An Idea Book on Planning* highlights effective methods and useful resources for planning schoolwide programs. *Volume II: Profiles of Promising Schoolwide Program Practices*, still in production, will provide detailed examples of how eight schools were conducting their schoolwide programs in 1998. Find the *Idea Book* online at www/ed.gov/pubs/Idea_Planning/ or call 1-877-4-ED-PUBS.

The Nine Components of Comprehensive Reform

The U.S. Department of Education's Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) program requires schools to state a reform plan containing nine specific components. A reform plan is not the same as a reform model, though a model may address some of the components. The plan as a whole forms an umbrella for the model and the other components.

1. Effective research-based, replicable methods and strategies — models — are at the core of the CSRD program. Reform models should rest on research. For example, Success for All has an intense, schoolwide focus on early literacy. The rationale? Research shows that third-graders lagging in basic skills are more likely than others to drop out later. But a research foundation is not enough. Schools should look for models that can show results. For instance, studies have found that compared to students in control-group schools, those in Success for All schools improved significantly on certain measures of reading performance. Finally, a model should exist in more than theory or an experimental setting; it should be operating in schools like the one writing the plan.

2. The plan must have a comprehensive design with aligned components, not a grab bag of programs and strategies. Models and programs should be consistent with state- and district-level standards and objectives. The plan should show how instruction, assessment, classroom management, parent involvement, and other factors all fit together to support each other.

3. The plan, or the models in it, should provide high-quality professional development — trainings, workshops, and classroom observations that will help teachers improve and enlarge their repertoire of instructional practices.

4. The plan needs checkpoints — measurable goals and benchmarks. For instance, by a certain time a certain percentage of students will meet a specific level of achievement or show a specific degree of improvement in certain skills.

5. A plan is unlikely to succeed without support within the school. Does the staff support the plan? Does the principal have the necessary leadership qualities to implement it? Some developers of models require a particular level of staff approval before they will agree to work with a school.

6. Parent and community involvement contribute to children's success in school. The plan should contain strategies for explaining the reform effort to parents and involving them in their child's academic efforts.

7. Comprehensive school reform is a major undertaking. The school will need external technical support and assistance from outside entities, such as the school district, the state department of education, regional educational laboratories, regional assistance centers, universities, or developers of reform models.

8. Is reform occurring as intended? Evaluation strategies will differ depending on which component of the plan is under scrutiny. Methods could include teacher and parent surveys and interviews, classroom observations, focus groups, data from the measurable goals and benchmarks component, review of documents, and rubrics for gauging the quality and degree of implementation.

9. CSRD funds are not enough to pay for school reform and are not intended to do so. The plan must demonstrate coordination of resources — federal, state, and district funds, and private contributions — in support of the CSRD program.

- A designated person in the school is responsible for managing the reform process
- The school participates in a network of like-minded schools and colleagues
- The district has stable leadership that supports the design, has a culture of trust between schools and the central office, provides schools with some autonomy over budgets and hiring, and commits resources for professional development and planning

Change of this depth and degree doesn't pop up overnight like mushrooms in a sodden lawn. Rather, it happens only after a long and laborious planning period. Experts recommend a full year of study, discussion, and training before launching a schoolwide program. Planning starts with self-study: The school must know where it is before it can decide where it wants to go. A thorough needs assessment is the "true beginning" of a school's transition to a schoolwide program, according to the Education Department. Where to start? Checking the school's achievement against state and district standards, the department counsels, should be Step One. Among the "indicators" of school performance that planning teams might look at are: performance on standardized and school-designed tests; course enrollments and rates of completing honors classes; student and teacher attendance; grading patterns; participation by students and parents in out-of-school activities; teacher participation in professional development; student mobility rates; school completion (in elementary and middle schools) and graduation rates; and meaningful breakouts of the information by English proficiency, migrant status, and family poverty.

With a good handle on its assets and deficits, a school is better positioned to select a model (or design a custom approach) that meets its needs, point for point. But choosing among the dozens of reform models on the market can be a dizzying proposition. Too often, observers say, schools latch onto a popular model without undertaking a careful assessment of the school's unique makeup. Confusing the issue further, a recent study by American Institutes for Research (AIR) found that only three or four of the most widely used models have solid research to back up their effectiveness (see Page 6, center margin).

Once a school settles on an external model, researchers caution that it can't be swallowed whole. It must be thoughtfully adapted to meet the school's special requirements—while retaining the essence and intent of its designers. It's a precarious tightrope that has left many schools dangling without a net.

"The problem is that (model) designers are trying to balance two competing demands," ***Education Week*** writes in an April article titled "Following the Plan." Quoting Rebecca Herman, who oversaw AIR's model-rating project, the journal notes: "On the one hand, they want teachers to feel ownership of a design and to be able to shape what it looks like in their school. On the other hand, they want to maintain enough integrity for the design to remain intact."

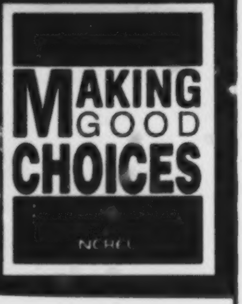
That balancing act causes many schools to stumble.

"There's no program that you can just take and stick in a school and make it happen the way it is on paper," Herman told ***Education Week***. "And sometimes, when you adapt it to the situation, you lose sight of what's critical to make the program work."

Unfortunately, schools looking for guidance won't find much of a research base on whole-school reform. But that is about to change. A slew of studies is in the works, according to ***Education Week***. And the Office of Educational Research and Improvement is funding several new initiatives designed to expand the knowledge base on schoolwide reform, including:

- A comprehensive school reform clearinghouse to make information readily available, including new research reports and information on specific models
- Development (including extensive evaluation) of six to perhaps 10 new comprehensive reform models for

otworthy Perspectives on Comprehensive School Reform, a new offering from the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning provides guidance to district and school staff in eight areas: selecting and implementing research-based instruction; invigorating education by reinventing staff development; using standards to set clear student goals; visionary leadership and support within the school; bringing the public back to public schools; evaluating comprehensive school reform initiatives; innovative approaches to maximizing resources; and aligning the components of comprehensive school reform. Copies are $5 from McREL, (303) 632-5506.



Comprehensive School Reform: Making Good Choices from the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory guides schools toward selecting the right whole-school strategies using a four-step process:

- Laying the groundwork
- Evaluating your current situation
- Profiling your comprehensive reform approach
- Making a decision

For ordering information. call NCREL at 1-800-356-2735.

the middle school and high school levels

- Increasing the capacity of several existing models to provide training, technical assistance, and materials to meet demands of increasing numbers of schools

"Experts hope such research will begin to fill in the gaps on what is considered one of the most promising innovations in education in years—but an innovation that remains unproven on a large scale," writes reporter Lynn Olson. She quotes Professor H. Jerome Freiberg of the University of Houston, who admits: "It's kind of like we're in an experimental phase with whole-school reform. We don't always have all the answers."

One thing the experts do know is that strong leadership at the building and district levels is necessary to success—necessary, but not sufficient. Only when teachers—all or at least most of them—embrace change and steer its course will reform take hold and flourish.

"By leading and managing schoolwides," the Education Department said in its 1996 newsletter, "teachers deepen their ownership of the schoolwide's mission and the effectiveness of the overall program. Teacher involvement is critical to starting and sustaining the reform effort, especially through shifts in school or district leadership."

Another mark of the schoolwide program is the central role played by parents and the community in which the children not only learn, but also eat, sleep, play, worship, and grow. To draw upon the enduring strengths and traditions of the neighborhood, schools must throw open their doors to welcome not only parents, but also businesses, community organizations, and social services. Students find more meaning in schoolwork when it's linked to the people and places that are important to their lives. And residents are more likely to become steadfast advocates for the school's program when they feel involved and valued.

"The emphasis on community involvement in schoolwide projects," the OESE notes, "demonstrates a new level of respect for the way children's heritage and context influence learning. Members of the community also help to establish and sustain the high standards that grant disadvantaged youth meaningful opportunities for achievement."

What's happening is a flip-flop of the old "risk" model. Traditionally, schools viewed differences in language and culture as disadvantages—as "risk factors" threatening children's chances for success. The more progressive view sees them as advantages—strong points that can give kids a leg up in the global marketplace and an appreciation for diversity. In Vancouver, for instance, Roosevelt's open-arms attitude toward its many immigrant families gives the school a colorful, international flair—like a little United Nations or an air hub for world travelers.

"Successful schoolwide projects," says LeTendre of the Education Department, "view cultural inclusiveness as a means of enhancing learning and participation for all students. Successful schoolwide projects embrace the diversity of their students as a resource that enriches learning.

"Such schools," she adds, "become the cultural hubs of their communities."

WORKS IN PROGRESS

Talk to any staff member at Vancouver's Roosevelt School, and you'll hear one word pop up over and over: flexibility. Their schoolwide plan is like a giant slab of wet clay that they constantly shape as new ideas and information come in.

This is the vision schoolwide advocates hold for the movement. These "works in progress," as the department calls them, must "shift and change" to remain viable in the dynamic world of teaching and learning.

"Schoolwide projects are never fully implemented, but are constantly evolving," LeTendre says. "Schools with successful projects foster a sense that the project continually evolves toward ever-higher goals." ■

THE SCHOOL THAT SAID, "WE THINK

By SUZIE BOSS

SPOKANE, Washington—If you asked around town about Bemiss Elementary School a few years ago, you might have heard: "Bemiss? Isn't that the one up by the junkyard?"

Or maybe: "Isn't Bemiss the one that's been in the news because it's so bad?"

Or worse: "Isn't Bemiss the one with the lazy teachers?"

In 1992 achievement tests, Bemiss students ranked rock bottom in the Spokane Public School District. The local newspaper ran a story, singling out Bemiss Elementary as "a school from the poor part of town, where kids couldn't learn and teachers couldn't teach," recalls current Principal Lorna Spear, who was teaching a multiage classroom at another Spokane school back then. Television stations picked up the story, leaving the Bemiss community feeling attacked. "It got personal," says Bonnie Smesrud, a primary teacher with a kind face and a big heart who grew up not far from the school where she's been teaching since 1974.

Without question, the Hillyard District where Bemiss is located has seen better times. The money that has poured into Spokane's downtown in recent years—bringing new buildings and cultural attractions to the scenic riverfront dis-

IMARY GRADES, ASSESSES A KINDERGARTNER'S READING SKIL

VE CAN ”

A PASSIONATE STAFF TAKES A STRUGGLING SCHOOL FROM RIDICULE TO RESPECT

trict—hasn't flowed uphill to this neighborhood, northeast of the city center.

Earlier this century, Hillyard was home to blue-collar workers who walked to jobs at the nearby railroad yards and roundhouse. Those glory days still provide some local color. There's a bold mural on the side of a building dedicated to railroad builder James Hill (the neighborhood's namesake), and a popular café housed in an old train car. But the steady, solid jobs that railroading once provided have faded into history like the noontime lunch whistle.

Poverty has grown more visible in recent years. Many of the small, wood-sided homes bordering Bemiss Elementary are peeling paint. Asphalt gives way to gravel at back alleys. Front yards are more likely to sport chain-link fences than flower gardens. Two housing projects provide subsidized shelter. Immigrants from Russia and Ukraine have recently found homes in the neighborhood, bringing an influx of schoolchildren for whom English is a new language and Spokane a new world. Many families are in transition, packing up children and possessions when relationships fray or bill collectors close in. Every year, one-third of the Bemiss enrollment turns over. And children who feel unsettled at home pack their worries with them to school.

Staff members at Bemiss have never used poverty as an excuse for poor academic performance, even though more than 80 percent of their students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. No one doubts that children from higher-income neighborhoods, with better-educated parents, enjoy advantages that help them succeed in school. But Bemiss children are the ones these educators feel compelled to teach. Says Smesrud, "This is where my heart is."

Instead of fleeing from criticism, Bemiss staff members have united behind the goal of remaking their school from the inside out, to give every child a chance to thrive. They weren't sure, when they began this journey, which path would take them where they needed to go. But like the hero of that classic children's tale, *The Little Engine That Could*, they've drawn strength from the motto, "We think we can." And they've been chugging steadily uphill ever since.

WHERE RESEARCH REIGNS

Principal Lorna Spear's office bulletin board is papered with charts and graphs—tangible, measurable proof of the academic gains Bemiss students have been making since the school began instituting reforms. The 620 students enrolled here in grades K-6 have made such remarkable improvements in achievement since 1993 that Bemiss has been honored by the U.S. Department of Education as a Title I Distinguished School. A big green banner in the front hallway, proclaiming the honor, reflects the school's successful track record of educating students in a high-poverty neighborhood.

When Spear arrived at Bemiss as an assistant principal in 1994, reform was already underway. After the low point of 1992, then-Principal Dale McDonald and Carol Olsen, Title I Coordinator for the Spokane district, helped rally the teaching staff behind the goal of whole-school improvement. Instead of targeting low-performing, economically disadvantaged students for special help, as the Title I program had traditionally done, the new concept was to improve results in every classroom. Three other schools in the district, all serving high-poverty students, started on schoolwide reform at the same time.

As an early step toward reform, a focus group of Bemiss teachers and administrators started investing time and energy in figuring out how to make change happen. They visited other schools, attended conferences, dug into the research literature, and developed consensus throughout the school community that change would be beneficial. "We looked at the structure of the school, our teaching strengths, the community's needs, everything," recalls Smesrud, who served on the original leadership team.

Every month, the leadership team from Bemiss met with teams from the three other Spokane schools that were also planning for schoolwide reform. "They talked about the challenges of organizational change, how they were involving parents, and other issues they were all facing," says Olsen, who brought more support for their cause from the district level. The four schools "all agreed to go through this process together, and they were ready for the yearlong planning process," Olsen says, remembering what helped make change possible. The four schools "all ended up a little different," she adds, "but they all went through a similar process."

Rather than investing in a packaged reform model, the Bemiss community elected to chart its own course. "We looked for the best available methods to help children learn," Smesrud recalls. In their quest for research-backed strategies to boost math and reading skills, members of the leadership team became convinced that teaching methods needed to change. "We knew we wanted to provide kid-centered, hands-on, active learning," Smesrud says, "and that's pretty different from the way most of us learned to teach. We were used to being the sage on the stage. Suddenly, we wanted teachers to become part of the action with their kids."

To keep the community informed about school reforms, McDonald recruited parents to serve on a site council. When he retired in 1998 after 13 years as principal, Spear was his logical successor. By then, she was already committed to the process.

The most recent evidence of success—so new it's not even on Spear's wall yet—is the third-graders' 1999 performance on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills. Although the "Iowas" had not been used as an assessment tool by Spokane schools before this spring, Bemiss third-graders ranked at the 53rd percentile among their peers across the country on a composite score of reading and math. "Any time a Title I school can reach out and touch 50," Spear says, "you're doing great." In specific areas, students scored well above average. Their scores for math problem solving and data interpretation, for instance, put them at the 68th percentile. On a different standardized test back in 1992, Spear offers by comparison, "We were seeing results down in the teens."

Because of her fluency with statistics, Spear's teachers jokingly call her the "Data Queen." It's a title she wears with pride. Barely five-feet tall, with tight curls swept back from her face, 42-year-old Spear is a dynamo. She walks fast, talks fast, and speaks forcefully when the welfare of her students is at stake. "Bemiss kids are smart," she says often, and with pride. "They just need a chance to show it."

This principal also knows that passion alone won't guarantee the extra help her students need to reach their potential. Drawing on local and federal funding and additional support from grants, Bemiss has been able to invest in the components that research proves are effective at raising student achievement: smaller classes, onsite professional development, academic training for parents, counseling, extended-day programs, mentoring programs, summer classes, access to computers, reading specialists, conflict-resolution training, and more. But every extra means lobbying for dollars in a community where other schools also serve low-income, high-need students.

Each new service that Bemiss adds also requires more time and energy from teachers who already stay at school long after the last bell rings. "We're trying to provide at school all the extras that other children (from less impoverished families) have at home," says Spear. While she's working late, her husband is often transporting their 14-year-old son to after-school sports and other activities.

To prove that all the energy and investments are paying off at Bemiss, Spear relies on numbers. "We do tons with data," she says. "We track results right to the classroom level. When our fourth-graders do well on achievement tests, we go back to every teacher they've ever had and let them know they are part of that success." In Washington, where students take achievement tests nearly every year between second and 10th grades, there are plenty of opportunities to crunch numbers. "We call it spreading the stress," Spear says with a weary-sounding laugh.

One question has helped to keep the reform efforts on track over the long run: "What are all the things that have to do with good instruction for kids? That has been our concern since we started," says Smesrud, who is now a member of the Bemiss Implementation Team, charged with putting the reform plan into action.

Every decision about how to improve teaching, adds Spear, has been supported by research about "what's best for kids." While staff members continue to attend conferences and stay current on academic research, the classroom has become the primary site for making change happen.

HELPING TEACHERS LEARN

Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Terrie who loved numbers. All through elementary school, math was her favorite subject. But when she was about 10 years old, the fun went out of math lessons. That's when she stopped getting the right answers. Her teacher said it was because she just wasn't good with numbers. So Terrie stayed away from math classes for a long, long time.

Fortunately, that's not where this story ends. Terrie Geaudreau fell back in love with numbers when she was in college and took a math class for future teachers. "It made sense to me. I understood it. And I realized that I know from experience what students who are struggling may need to gain understanding," she says, her eyes glinting with enthusiasm behind wire-rimmed glasses.

Geaudreau, 44, has devoted much of her career to teaching those for whom math is a challenge. Before coming to Bemiss four years ago as a math facilitator for the primary grades, Geaudreau was a Title I math teacher at other schools in Spokane. She worked with students targeted for special help because of

"What's best for kids?" is the driving question behind reform

School change timeline

1992: Bemiss Elementary ranks last in Spokane school district on Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills

1993: Bemiss leadership team forms to begin push for schoolwide reform, along with three other schools in Spokane; district pilot program funds one early childhood facilitator at Bemiss for onsite professional development

1994: Bemiss staff writes mission statement and beliefs, asserting, "It is the mission of Bemiss Elementary School, in partnership with parent/guardians and community, to empower each child to achieve his/her fullest potential to become a lifelong learner and responsible citizen."

1995: Bemiss staff reaches consensus on schoolwide goals; creates instructional frameworks aligned with Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements

1996: U.S. Department of Education honors Bemiss as a Distinguished School in the Title I program

1999: Bemiss third graders take Iowa Tests of Basic Skills for the first time, ranking at 53rd percentile nationally on composite of math and reading scores

poverty and low achievement. While she saw some of her students make short-term gains, she concluded that pull-out assistance wasn't the best way to help them succeed over the long term. "I tracked my own students and found out that they weren't retaining what they learned (from special assistance), unless they were in a classroom where teachers could continue to make a difference." She became convinced, "You can't make significant changes without changing classroom teaching strategies."

Convincing teachers to change "happens slowly and takes patience," says Geaudreau. Her position is one of four peer coaching slots created by the Bemiss reform plan: two facilitators focus on math, two on literacy. Like her fellow facilitators, Geaudreau has had to win the trust of teachers. At their invitation, she'll eagerly model strategies designed to make math concepts more understandable through active discovery. But first, she has to convince teachers to let her in the door. "Some teachers were scared at first," Geaudreau admits. "They thought I was an administrator there to observe or criticize them."

When the first facilitator came to Bemiss through a district pilot program, many teachers felt defensive. Recalls Smesrud, "At first I worried, 'Is she here to judge my teaching? Does she think I can't do my job?'" But those fears faded quickly. "I admired her knowledge. I started wanting to model myself after her. But then I worried, 'Can I change myself enough?'"

Geaudreau and the other facilitators don't criticize or impose a "right way" of teaching. Rather, they try to build on each teacher's individual strengths. After a few classroom sessions with a literacy facilitator, for instance, Smesrud started branching out from the basals and controlled vocabulary lists she had always used to teach reading. "I realized my kids could check out library books, even if they didn't know all the vocabulary. I didn't feel so stifled or limited as a teacher," she says. "I was more willing to try new things." Most of all, facilitators encourage teachers to continue to be learners themselves. As Geaudreau adds with the hint of a grin, "I like to inject some disequilibrium."

On a late spring morning, for instance, Geaudreau pops in the door of Carren Peck's third-grade class. Right away, she turns students loose to work in pairs or small groups, using whatever strategies they prefer to crack the question: If five presidents are in a room together and each shakes the others' hands, how many handshakes are exchanged? "And don't just give me the answer," Geaudreau challenges the class. "You've gotta prove your answer, or I won't believe you. *Tell me why.*"

It's a noisy process. Some students act out the handshake exchange. Others make charts. Still others draw schematics on the chalkboard. When Peck studied to become a teacher more than 20 years ago, classrooms were more orderly and learning less noisy. But to her credit, Peck now jumps right into the messy learning process, testing out problem-solving strategies alongside her students.

Watching this active classroom scene unfold, Geaudreau explains, "I try not to give too much direction to the teacher or her students. I want to keep her learning, too. And she is. She's changing the way she's teaching." Peck's third-graders were among those who shined on the Iowa tests this spring. "I had butterflies the whole time they were taking the test," Peck admits, "but they were so well prepared. They did beautifully."

To convince teachers to change their classroom practices, the Bemiss facilitators rely on their interpersonal skills and intuition, along with their solid understanding of how to teach concepts. Geaudreau, for instance, has been honored by the district with the title of Distinguished Teacher. But within the Bemiss building, she's been known to bribe her way with chocolate.

Deb Portner, a facilitator for literacy in the primary grades, says part of her job "is to say to teachers, 'You're doing good work.' Teachers are people who need praise but seldom get it." Recently, for instance, kindergarten teacher Bobbi Wakely asked Portner for an opinion about a little girl's reading progress. Portner spent half of a class period with the child, listening to her read aloud and posing questions to test her comprehension. Her assessment? "This child was reading at the second-grade level—in kindergarten. Bobbi's obviously doing a wonderful job. She just needed another set of eyes to confirm what she was seeing."

Relationships are key to making the onsite professional development approach work, says Barb Miller, a literacy facilitator for the intermediate grades. "Some teachers want me to model a concept. Others are more interested in collaborating. They don't always tell me what they want, so I try to lead with questions. What is a teacher ready to try? What are her goals? If we have a good relationship, I can feel comfortable making suggestions."

What the facilitators and classroom teachers share, Miller adds, "is a belief that these kids badly need the best from us. So many

Immigrants from Russia and Ukraine are part of the Bemiss community

Principal Lorna Spear pays a classroom visit.

areas of their lives are a challenge. This is one place where we can help." She remembers one boy wearing only a T-shirt and jeans on a day when it was 25 degrees outside. During a first-period writing lesson, his fingers were too numb to hold a pencil. Another boy, preparing to write an essay about a memorable day, jotted down these prompt words to organize his thoughts: Mom. Dad. House. Jobs. Money. Fight. Hurt. Hospital. Sad.

"But even when they come to school with incredible challenges in their lives," Miller says, "these kids can learn. We believe that in our bones." And because of the community of support that reform has helped to build at Bemiss, "There are others here to remind you that they believe it, too, for those days when you get frustrated."

PULLING PARENTS IN

When Marlene Stewart became a Bemiss parent back in 1993, she wouldn't have dreamed of voicing her opinion about how to make the school or community a better place. "I'd had mostly bad experiences with schools," she says. "I was not confident of any social system."

Raising three children as a single parent, Stewart says: "My first goal was to keep my kids safe. You can't do anything until you're sure of that." And the neighborhood had her worried. Her children had to walk to school on streets that were unpaved and dusty. The property next to the school was literally a junkyard, overflowing with an accumulation of debris. She and her kids would walk their dog around the junk-strewn hillside, looking at the vista beyond their immediate surroundings. Stewart found herself imagining something better—for her neighborhood, her children, and herself.

As soon as her youngest child started kindergarten, Stewart enrolled at Spokane Falls Community College. She also accepted then-Principal McDonald's invitation to get involved as a school volunteer. "The first job they gave me was doing cut-outs," she says, "but my involvement has grown from there."

That's a bit of an understatement. Stewart is completing a term as chairperson of the Bemiss Site Council and has become a powerful force for change in the community. She helped push for a cleanup of the junkyard and has been actively pursuing a plan to convert the 25-acre site to recreational use. She has also advocated for an extended-day program at Bemiss School. While her children have been receiving extra help with academics, Stewart has had time to continue her studies in urban and regional planning at Eastern Washington University.

Her experience as a Bemiss parent has played no small part in her personal growth. "I've matured as a person as I've gotten more involved in this school," she says.

Since the reform effort began at Bemiss, the school has worked hard to reach out to parents like Stewart. "When parents are offered resources, they feel less alone and isolated," says Melissa Kopczynski, a Bemiss counselor. She often refers families to social services and agencies outside the school. "We can't fix family dynamics at school," Kopczynski says, "but we can play a facilitator role. Parents can get involved here and feel like they're part of a larger family."

Despite the open door, parents as actively involved as Stewart remain the exception. Recruiting volunteers in a high-poverty neighborhood is an ongoing challenge, Spear acknowledges. Some parents have had bad experiences with schools in the past. Many are working two jobs already and can't find time to volunteer. Some are not confident about their own skills. And when budget cuts loom, Bemiss parents are not likely to write letters or call the school board. "Our parents don't tend to speak up," says Spear. "We have to advocate for them."

Bemiss has gradually expanded its base of volunteers by providing academic training to parents. The school trains parents in the same strategies used to teach reading and math in their children's classes, then pays them a small stipend for volunteering time in the classroom. In addition, a Family Learning Center equipped with computers and books is open to families throughout the day and after school. Parents can attend adult-education classes at the school in the evenings.

For some parents, access to these resources provides a turning point. "We see parents gaining confidence and developing good work habits," says Smesrud. "Then we have to struggle to hold onto them as volunteers. Once we have them trained," she adds, "they often wind up getting new jobs." But as her smile indicates, that's cause for celebration, not complaint.

The Bemiss community has learned that success often brings new challenges. Now that this school has become a shining example of reform, other schools—poor, but not as poor as Bemiss—are asking to share the district's Title I funds. The Spokane district currently has five Title I Schoolwide programs in place and soon will add a sixth, says Olsen. For the 1999-2000 school year, Bemiss Elementary is projected to lose nearly $50,000, forcing cuts in staffing. Says Spear, "We're going to fight to keep the integrity of our program. The budget struggle makes us more determined to succeed."

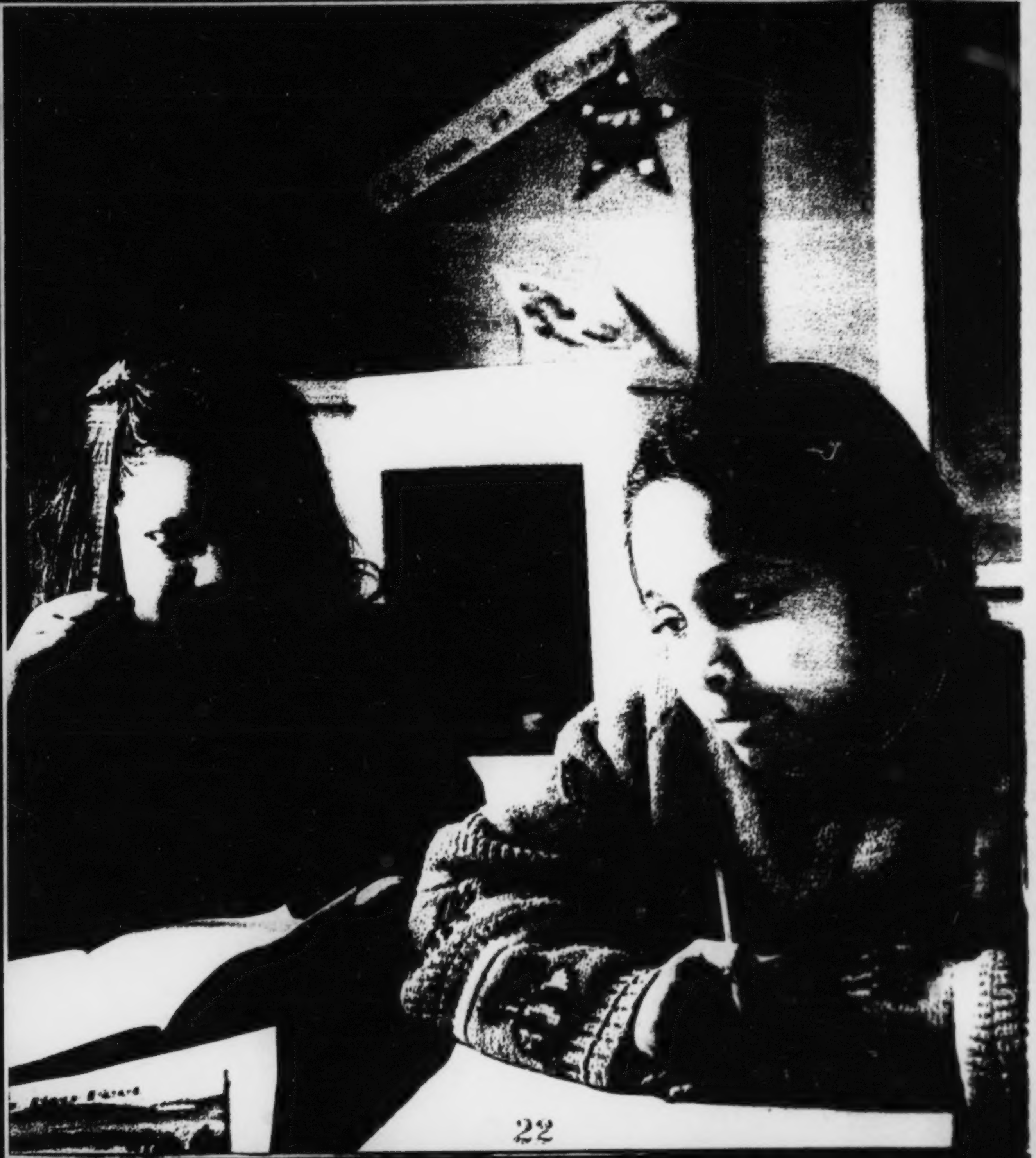
Success at Bemiss has come about not only because of financial investments but also through "creation of a complex system," says Olsen. "It takes individual teachers in their classrooms, a principal with a vision, support from downtown [at the district level], and support from the community." A unified vision is what ties all these pieces together, Olsen adds. "At Bemiss, they share a vision of what kids can do."

Spear describes that vision forcefully: "How do we help the children of poverty? Are they children who can learn? We believe they are. And we believe we know how to help them. And we'll just keep pushing," she says, "until all children are making it."

Here in the Hillyard District, that road ahead can look awfully steep sometimes. But almost every day, says counselor Kopczynski, "We see glimmers of wonderful." Recently, a mother from the neighborhood spoke these quiet words at a site council meeting, reminding everyone at Bemiss why they do what they do: "When my daughter was born in 1992, I thought to myself, poor thing—she has to go to Bemiss. But now that she's a first-grader and thriving here, I feel like, Wow! She gets to go to Bemiss!" ■

NO MORE REVOLVING DOOR

By CATHERINE PAGLIN



[illegible] PHOTO BY CATHERINE PAGLIN

A schoolwide literacy block ends disruptive pullouts

PORTLAND, Oregon— As Principal Paula McCullough strides through her school, little footsteps pursue her down a quiet hallway. "Our teacher said if you have time for it, we can read you a story," a small voice says.

"Well, come, let's sit down here right now," says McCullough as she nods toward a bench. Charaknigh, a tiny Cambodian-American first-grader, sits beside her and reads from the story he has carefully penciled on blue-lined newsprint. His tale, "The Alien UFO," is about a boy who wants to buy a flying saucer, but his aunt tells him it costs too much.

Students at Daniel A. Grout School in Southeast Portland have lots of stories to tell—stories from the worn apartments and cramped, postwar houses of their working-class neighborhood. Often less fanciful than Charaknigh's, these stories have titles like "How I Came from Russia to Portland." They tell about beloved people (a Blackfeet Indian grandfather, an absent father) and events both memorable and painful (a visit to Romania, parents fighting and divorcing, moving too many times).

The staff, too, has a story to tell. And tell it they do—with zest. It's the story of how they built a unified literacy program that sparked change across the school. Of countless meetings sweetened with chocolate and fueled with caffeine. Of anxious discussions voicing fears that always come with profound change. Of their pride and pleasure in work well done. And while the story will have no ending as long as there are children to teach, students' personal stories are sure to turn out better for the efforts being made at Grout.

Five years ago when the story begins, Grout's classroom teachers shared a deepening dissatisfaction with the school's low reading scores. Yet they were upset by the remedy then in place for those low scores: pullout sessions for kids in Title I, special ed, and ESL programs. With 20 percent of Grout's 400 students in ESL and 60 percent on free and reduced-price lunch, the pullouts created constant disruptions in the classroom.

"We had a revolving door," says fifth-grade teacher Carolyn Neal. "You rarely had your whole class for any longer than 30 minutes a day with all the ins and outs and pullouts."

The pullouts didn't work well for the special-programs staff either. "I felt I was really being a bother and I should apologize every time I came to the door to get kids," says ESL teacher Cynthia Bauer. And by the time she spent five minutes gathering kids from different classrooms and five minutes sending them back, there wasn't much left of the half-hour allotted for language instruction.

The Grout staff tried loading certain classrooms with ESL or special ed students and then teaming classroom teachers with special-programs staff. They tried common pullout times for each grade level. Neither option worked well.

Spinning Straw into Gold

The tug-of-war for students' time was resolved three years ago by intensifying and consolidating literacy instruction. Four days a week, every teacher and staff assistant is enlisted to work with kids on reading and writing during two 90-minute literacy blocks (one for lower grades and one for third through fifth grade). The plan has paid off handsomely. Reading scores are climbing, and more kids are meeting state benchmarks.

On a typical morning, first-grade teacher Marion Lei leads a Junior Great Books discussion group during literacy block.

"Why did the miller's daughter promise to give her first child to Rumpelstiltskin? Why do you suppose she did that?" Lei asks. Hands shoot up furiously. "Cassidy?"

"She had no other valuables to give him," answers Cassidy.

Like the miller's daughter, Grout's classroom teachers are giving away their kids. But they're happy to do it. Of Lei's 26 students, five are attending an ESL literacy group, two are at a drama workshop, and three are with a special-ed instructor. Because all staff teach during the literacy blocks, student-teacher ratios drop dramatically. Many specialized groups contain only five to eight students. Classroom teachers' class loads dip to an enviable 16 or 18.

Depending on grade level, other literacy options include one-to-one tutoring with volunteers, small-group instruction with the Title I coordinator, Young Authors groups for advanced writers, and Internet exploration with the librarian.

There's even a group for chronic classroom disrupters.

The multiple groupings also allow classroom teachers to send kids across grade levels to better meet their needs. "I can send some of my lower [fifth-grade] readers to third grade, and it doesn't have a stigma—it's a literacy group," says Neal.

While no bargains with Rumpelstiltskin were necessary to achieve the highly prized smaller class sizes, changes in staff roles and relationships were essential. "The teachers really had to trust that another staff person could actually teach their kids," says Title I Coordinator Sharon Himes.

That's because literacy-group instructors are not treated as add-ons. In all but first grade (where the literacy block is shorter), if a student has a special instructor for reading and writing, that instructor—not the classroom teacher—gives all instruction and assigns the grades in those subjects.

"Before I came," says McCullough, who teaches a literacy group herself one day a week, "there were several staff members—very qualified teachers—who really did not want to let go of owning their own kids. They chose to go to another school."

ESL teacher Bauer initially opposed the plan. "To me it felt like jumping off into black space," she says. "For years and years, I'd been sort of a supplemental program and never the one signing the bottom line for this learning. I was out of practice, and it was frightening to think I was really the person responsible for this." This early doubter is now "a real convert" and a member of the school's literacy committee. "I am a part of a team, and I feel valued," she says.

The literacy program is a watershed for increased professionalism and collegiality, the teachers agree. The literacy-resource room is an example. "Instead of everyone hoarding their own materials, we have put them together and we are sharing them," says Bauer. "Building this together really has made a wonderful atmosphere in the staff." A similar room for sharing math materials is in the works.

All staff take part in twice-yearly student testing and quarterly discussions to assign students to literacy groups. All staff attend important trainings. Because they share such experiences, staff also share students with confidence. "I can trust that they will be looking at a whole student, knowing what they need at that grade level," says fifth-grade teacher Ginger Leffal-Husak. "I feel that I can send my children off and I won't be getting back a child who's studying Brazil when we're studying the United States."

The literacy-program kickoff in fall 1996 coincided with McCullough's arrival at Grout. It also marked the school's conversion to a Title I Schoolwide program. The "schoolwide" designation lets schools use funds to improve instruction for all kids, not just targeted students. "Being schoolwide gives you so much more flexibility," says McCullough. "It's an ideal way to start reform."

The literacy program takes advantage of this flexibility. If, for example, a high-achieving student runs into a writing problem and needs extra help, a teacher can place that student in a small group or tutoring program run by the Title I coordinator.

Under McCullough's leadership, school reform has continued to evolve beyond the literacy block. "She kind of empowered them to keep going," says Carolyn Moilanen, a Portland Public Schools Title I specialist. "She doesn't ever take credit."

In 1998, the Grout staff heard about the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) program—like the Title I Schoolwide program, but more rigorous. CSRD requires schools to develop a detailed, comprehensive plan for reform, including specific goals for student achievement.

Because Grout was more ready than most to move ahead with school reform, Oregon's Department of Education approved a $25,000 "early bird" grant (out of other federal funds) before actual CSRD money was available. Only three other Oregon schools were awarded these funds.

Most CSRD schools are adopting existing whole-school reform models, such as Success for All or Coalition of Essential Schools. Not Grout. "It would have been weird for them to go out and find a new (whole-school) model," says Moilanen, who helped the staff develop their CSRD proposal. "For this school, it would have been nuts because they already had an underlying structure to push reform. They knew where the holes were in literacy."

Those "holes" are what the staff found when they took a critical look at their program and achievement data. They saw two glaring needs: to intervene early with failing readers and to develop higher-order thinking skills.

To fill these holes, the staff selected two research-based skill-and-content models: Reading Recovery for struggling first-graders and Junior Great Books to promote reading comprehension, speaking skills, and critical thinking. McCullough hopes that indepth discussions of literature will help fill in gaps for kids whose home lives lack family outings or dinner-table conversations. The Junior Great Books "shared inquiry method" is an approach teachers can use in all content areas with kids of all ability levels and English-language skills.

While continuing to hone their skills with the Junior Great Books questioning strategies, the Grout staff are gearing up to match their literacy achievements in the area of math. The school will create a math block and adopt the Woodlawn Math Model, a very successful teaching approach developed at another Title I school, Portland's Woodlawn School. Like Grout's literacy program, Woodlawn Math focuses on early intervention and higher-order thinking skills.

Money from more than 10 different pots—including Goals 2000, Portland Public Schools Foundation, and gifted-education funds—is paying for the ongoing transformation at Grout. The school is moving toward full-day kindergarten—an essential piece in the literacy puzzle if more students are to meet third-grade benchmarks. After-school tutoring in reading and math for students within 10 points of meeting benchmarks is another emerging piece of the school-reform picture at Grout.

Old Hands at Planning

The CSRD funding and planning process supports Grout's school-improvement efforts. But it's the staff, under McCullough's leadership, that really drives change. "It's an extremely cohesive staff, extremely accustomed to working in small groups," says G.M. Garcia, an Oregon Department of Education Distinguished Educator who supported Grout in the CSRD application process. "The notion of planning, to them, was not a new thing," agrees Moilanen.

Every Grout teacher belongs to at least one committee—literacy, math, or discipline. "We talk about the concerns and issues the whole staff has, we'll come to some consensus in those committees, and then go back and talk about it again with the staff," says McCullough. Once a program is put in place, it is continually re-examined and refined.

"They work together for kids," says McCullough of her staff. "They're willing to give up a personal interest if that helps the school as a whole."

Other schoolwide initiatives have sprung from the staff's ability to reach consensus. They've agreed, for instance, on a structured system of infraction slips and detentions for rule breakers. Well-behaved students get rewards. A teacher on special assignment runs an alternative classroom where severely disruptive students are placed temporarily or permanently. "Our instruction time was getting eaten up," says David Snyder, coordinator of the Motivation Station. "So we decided as a staff to create this program. If the teachers have problems with a student, they send them to me and I work on solving those problems."

From year to year, teacher to teacher, homework at Grout is due in the same format and on the same day of the week. All students have the same notebook and system for organizing their work. Students who have not finished homework on time must do it at "the opportunity table" during lunch hour.

"I was not gung-ho on it, but once again I was proven wrong," says second-grade teacher Kris Amling, who initially doubted students would do the homework. "They really are returning it every day."

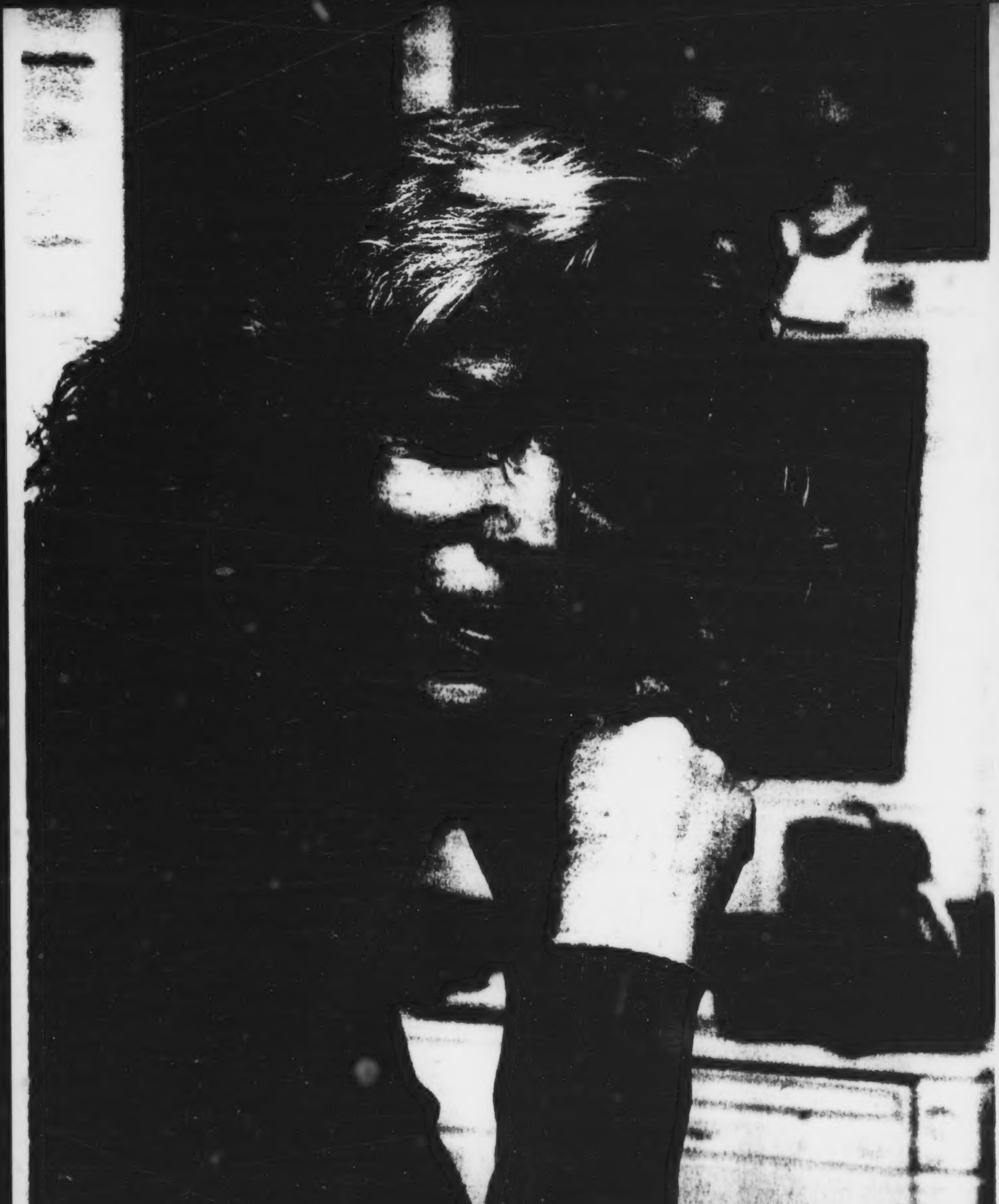
Admittedly, schoolwide policies and practices may detract to some degree from teacher autonomy. But at this school, consistency for kids comes first. "There are many combination families, and many of our parents work shift jobs," says McCullough. "You want to support them because you want them to support their kids. You can't do it if you keep changing the expectations and rules."

Grout's staff pursue school improvement with dedication, not dogma. Everything is up for discussion. "You don't make an assumption that this is good or this is bad," says McCullough. "You talk about it and you really look at it. It's from everybody's best thinking that we have the program that we do."

EVERYTHING

DEEP CHANGE REQUIRES A MAVERICK PRINCIPAL AND A STAFF THAT'S WILLING TO PUT ALL RESOURCES ON THE TABLE

When the U.S. Department of Education launched the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) program last year, Oregon's 130 lowest-performing schools were eligible for funds. Many, but not all, were Title I schools. Fewer than 40 completed the application developed by Title I Specialist Chris Rhines and her colleagues at the state Education Department. After a year of screening and winnowing, 20 schools made the final cut. Rhines, who oversees CSRD statewide and coordinated the search for suitable schools, talked with *Northwest Education* magazine Editor Lee Sherman about the challenge of making change on a schoolwide scale.



> We believe that for true school reform to happen—and especially in the lowest-performing schools that need to make instructional changes—the principals need to focus on being instructional leaders.

NW Education magazine: What traits were you looking for in schools as you narrowed down the field of applicants for CSRD?

Chris Rhines: We looked for things such as district support, leadership capacity in the building, and some kind of experience with change—some kind of evidence that they have even *thought* about making changes in the way they do things in their school.

NW: So they needed to have a certain level of readiness for change in place—to be part of the way along the journey, in a sense.

Rhines: Yes. Some were eliminated because they had no evidence of that at all. We felt that they needed to have such a strong foundation to be able to make CSRD work, and we couldn't spend the year getting people ready for that.

NW: The process of determining which schools can really make deep changes in the way they do things is kind of subjective, isn't it? You're not just looking at scores and objective measures. You're looking at readiness and willingness to change. How do you really get a handle on that?

Rhines: Yes, it was somewhat subjective. Our preapplications were sent to districts (rather than schools). Most district people will tell you, in a closed room, "Oh, yes, *that* school, *that* principal, *that* leadership team, *they* have the capacity to do it." But the thing we have to keep in mind is that if they had all those pieces in place, they probably wouldn't be consistently low-performing schools. So something was missing.

When we crafted the questions—we only had five questions—we hoped district people would answer them. That's not what happened. I think it's because districts got the application, and it said: "Please talk about the leadership qualities of this principal. What are some examples of leadership that principal has exhibited?" Most district people gave it to the principal and said, "Here, you write this." And they read like resumes, really.

That's why we did the site visit. We spent a half-day in each school we visited, interviewing the principal, talking about things like, "What would you see as the most pressing need for change in your school?" and, "How would you envision getting your staff there?" and "What do you think are the important things?" Really, we were just talking about all the things that we know from research are necessary.

When we met with the entire staff, we insisted that it be the *entire* staff, including classified staff and parents who were in leadership roles, too. Then we asked staff to do a survey that asked very pointed questions, like, "Does your principal have the leadership capacity?" "What are the strengths of your staff?" And then we scored them and made decisions about what constituted a positive survey and what was a negative. We had to feel that at least 80 percent of the staff were onboard and felt this was something they really wanted to do—and they were willing to work hard. If we didn't have 80 percent, they were eliminated.

There's one school that comes to mind that, when we read the application, the principal received a really high score. When we talked with the principal, we felt really good about it. But then we talked with teachers individually, asking very pointed questions, such as, "Do you think your principal has the leadership qualities to be able to make this happen?" And that's when things started coming out. Some people said, "No, the principal's way too negative and doesn't know how to bring us together" and "There's a lot of infighting on the staff, and the principal doesn't want to battle the thing."

In many schools, it was a new concept to have their instructional assistants involved in that level of discussion and planning. Yet those are the very people who are working with some of the neediest children. And those are the people who may have no idea what's going on in school reform, and they need it the most.

NW: It sounds like you see the principal's role as being really critical in all of this. What are the most important qualities of a principal, to be able to lead this kind of change?

Rhines: A principal has to be many things today. They have to be an instructional leader to be able to do this process. But principals also have to spend a lot of time as managers of the building, dealing with discipline, dealing with parent concerns, dealing with staffs and unions and districts and all those things. Some principals who are wonderful instructional leaders may not be very good managers—but they're really good at figuring out how to get other people to do that stuff. And then there are other principals who are wonderful managers, but they're not good at being instructional leaders. They count on their teachers to do that. There will be professional development for the school, but the principal won't come because the principal's too busy doing other things. So the principal doesn't know what's going on in the classroom. We believe that for true school reform to happen—and especially in the lowest performing schools that need to make instructional changes—the principals need to focus on being instructional leaders.

And then, of course, there's that leadership capacity of being able to move people off the dime. If you have a staff of people who are quite happy with the way they're teaching now, yet the principal knows that isn't moving kids, they need to be able to do more than just say, "Well, I'll have to wait until that person retires."

So I guess it's being someone who's a bit of a maverick. And these 20 principals are—they are all very strong instructional leaders. The research says the most successful schoolwides have strong leadership, a strong principal. Another really critical piece is that the principal has to be able to build a team of people—whether it's a site council or a leadership team—where they're not totally responsible for everything that happens in the building.

NW: How would you distinguish the most important difference between Title I Schoolwide and CSRD in terms of the emphasis? The emphasis of Title I Schoolwide seems to be on serving all kids in less segregated settings. If that's right, what's the main focus for CSRD?

Rhines: With CSRD, the emphasis is on the word "comprehensive." You're trying to take every single thing you do in your building and integrate it. You focus on a plan, and everybody in the building is aware of that plan. I believe that's the intent of schoolwides, but I don't think that's what has happened with most schoolwides. I think there are several reasons for that. Schools that have been targeted-assistance schools and want to become eligible for Title I Schoolwide, sometimes go after it for the wrong reasons. They go after it because they think it means, "Now we don't have to identify a certain group of kids; we can use our Title I resources for any kid, for any program." And that's fine, that's good, but if that's where it stops, it's a schoolwide in name only. I've been in many schoolwides where they're doing business exactly the same way (as they were before). It's just that now they don't have target lists of kids.

What we've discovered is that in some schools, they still really don't understand just what schoolwide and CSRD mean—that you're taking everything that you do and you're putting it on the table.

NW: How does Oregon compare to the other Northwest states in the process of selecting CSRD schools?

Rhines: I don't think that anybody else is giving the same level of technical assistance. We have the luxury of only having 20 schools, but we only have five Distinguished Educators, who have been the primary technical-assistance providers to the CSRD schools. The primary role of DEs is working with schoolwides. Their Number One role is to help schools that are going through their planning year, and CSRD has also been a main focus for them this year.

NW: How do you see CSRD and Title I Schoolwide fitting into the larger picture of statewide school reform? That's a lot of stuff for people to try to weave together and keep in mind as they do their planning...

Rhines: Well, it's one of the things we try to emphasize every time we're out there. We need to make sure people understand that when they do CSRD, it's not just Title I, it's everything. When they do schoolwide, it's everything. That's the hardest hurdle for them. It's the first message that people need to hear: that this is all just a part of their consolidated school or district improvement plan. It all needs to be woven like a braid. They need to still be able to take the braid apart and see the individual strands, but they need to put it together. And it's one of the most difficult things to do.

NW: When you talk about Title I Schoolwide schools that are still doing business as usual except they're not identifying individual kids or populations, the danger is that some kids just don't get services. How do you keep track of all the needs of all these diverse groups of kids and yet serve them all in one place?

Rhines: What we tell people is that when you really are looking at integrating things, you're coming to the table and you're saying, "What are all the resources that we have in this building—all the people resources, all the money resources?" and "What needs do our kids have?" and "What is the most effective, efficient way for us to meet those needs?" Sometimes, they may say, "We still believe—and we can back this up with our needs assessment—that the best thing is to identify the kids who are at greatest risk of not meeting the state standards and pulling those kids out for additional instruction."

In some cases, it's a philosophical thing; in some cases it's habit. Sometimes a pullout is very appropriate. But in many cases, I think it's because of that "quick-fix" idea or mentality that has been prevalent in our schools for many, many years.

So I guess to answer your question, you're right, that is a big problem. In some schoolwides where they have *totally* abandoned pullouts and they just bring an instructional assistant in the classroom or the Title I teacher in the classroom, it isn't accomplishing anything, either. They need to really take a look at their needs and identify what's the best way to meet the needs of all these individual kids.

NW: Do you see turf battles?

Rhines: Oh, yes.

NW: Especially where people are used to having their own area and managing their own funds?

Rhines: Oh, yes. Definitely.

NW: How do you overcome that?

Rhines: Again, that's all just part of the whole change process. It's a paradigm shift. It's getting people to put all the resources on the table. It's very hard sometimes in places where Title I has been a separate entity—where they are able to buy their own books in their own room. In some cases, that might be just fine. But it's that slow discussion, I guess, of bringing people around. One of the things that we try to always do is go back to the needs assessment, go back to make it data driven, and say: "Is that working? Do you have evidence that that is working?" If not, maybe it's time to really go back and examine what isn't working and what it is that you need to change.

But yes, the turf battles are big. Going back to the CSRD process, that was a big question we asked people in those schools when we visited. We first asked the principals, Do you have turf battles between your Title I staff, your special ed staff, your ESL program? We tried to get some background about that and then *very* pointedly asked Title I teachers: "What if you went through this process of identifying needs, and your staff as a whole made some tough decisions that would really impact you? How are you going to feel about that?" And some of them said, "I think that's just fine, because I care most about what's good for these kids and not what's good for me." You can usually tell when you're talking one-on-one with a person if they *really* feel that way.

You need to have those conversations. It goes back to the leadership at the district level, and with the principal not being afraid to fight that battle and to make those changes.

NW: Does it worry you that a recent study found only four or five external models that had solid data supporting their effectiveness? What if schools pick models that haven't really been proven effective?

Rhines: This is what we're telling schools: That study by the American Institutes for Research was based on 24 external models. It wasn't a study of every single model out there. We're asking schools to also use the Continuum of Effectiveness in the Northwest Regional Lab's *Catalog of School Reform Models*. That report has a table that shows what the model is good at and what it isn't. If there's an area that, according to that study or the Northwest Lab's catalog, is not strong, schools need to address how they're going to get around that.

The research base is big for us. The model has to have a research base that they can document. One of *the* most important things is that it has been replicated in a school that is very similar to theirs, and that that school has had some success for more than three years. The 20 schools have really worked hard at that as they develop their reform plans. Their phone bills must be really high! I've talked to principals who've been on the phone to other schools that have adopted a model, and they've learned a lot. And what I said was: Keep calling until you find somebody who says, "We tried that and it didn't work at all for us." And that's the one you really want to talk to and find out why. Several schools who've done that have discarded models that they thought would meet their needs.

NW: When you see schools getting stuck in the process, what's the biggest thing they get stuck on, where they can't seem to move ahead and make progress?

Rhines: Well, I think one of the biggest things is that many people in schools don't seem to know how to do a needs assessment. They don't seem to know how to analyze data so that it means something. They're all smart, and so they can look at test information and say, "Oh, look at this, and yeah, let's disaggregate this." But they don't know how to write a prescription for what they see in the needs. Many times I've seen people who write up this elaborate needs assessment: "We analyzed our math data, and we were able to see that it was our fourth-grade boys who were having a hard time with math." And then you see their program design, and they have three Title I instructional assistants pulling kids out for reading.

NW: No correlation.

Rhines: There's no correlation. So that match is a problem. And I guess the other thing I see as a big stumbling block is lack of time. There's no time for people to do the things they need to be able to do. Every bit of research about good professional development says it shouldn't just be a one-shot deal, it should be continuous. They don't have the time to do that. I think time is probably the Number One barrier for everybody. I don't know what the answer is. I wish I did.

NW: An article in *Education Week* recently talked about "the intense interest in CSRD," describing it as the possible salvation of Title I. Do you see that? It seems that this process is so complex and requires so much buy in that it isn't going to work in every school that could use it.

Rhines: I was just interviewed by someone who's doing a national study of states that have begun implementation of CSRD. He asked that very question. He said that most of the states focus almost totally on the model, not on the comprehensive plan. He said I was the 26th state he had called, and he said, "You're the only ones I've talked to so far who are not focusing just on the model."

The way I interpret that statement—"perhaps this will be the salvation"—is that maybe the person who made that statement thinks that what Title I schools need to do instead of putting their money into staffing and hiring a Title I teacher or a Title I instructional assistant, is to put that money into a model. I'm not so sure that's a bad thing, because I think in many cases you get a lot more bang for your buck. I get calls from a lot of people who say "We'd love to do Success For All, but we don't have $100,000." And I say, "Yes, you do have $100,000. You're using it right now to pay for a Title I teacher and three instructional assistants. You could make a change and use that money."

But that's where the conversation stops. It's because there are real faces and real people attached to those jobs, and because education is based on tradition in many cases, and it's very hard to change that. I think that's what they mean by it being the salvation—that if it works, then they can come in and say, "This is more effective than what you've been doing." Our concern is, we don't have the capacity to get everybody ready like that. How are we going to do that? That's our stumbling block at the moment.

NW: One of the nine CSRD criteria calls for meaningful parent involvement. What does that mean and how do you get that?

Rhines: That's a good question. In our application, we've defined "meaningful involvement" as activities that will somehow, eventually, lead to improved student achievement. In the old days when I was a Title I teacher, we based our successful parent involvement on how many parents came to the carnival. But did that carnival help improve anybody's student achievement? No. Was it a good thing for a school? Yeah, because it got our parents in, and people were happy, and you have to be happy! It can't all be just about academics. But for this plan, the only parent involvement activities we want them to write about are those that are tied back to their goals. ■

Stepping Up the Rigor

A tiny, rural school intensifies its reform efforts

By SAMANTHA MOORES

SALEM, Oregon— Talk to the students at Lake Labish Elementary, and one thing becomes clear: This year, school has been different. It's different in a lot of ways, say the kids, but nowhere is the change more noticeable than in reading class.

"Last year it was just read on your own," explains a fifth-grader named J.C. "It was funner, but we didn't learn as much. Now they are asking us more questions about the stories, so we understand better."

"We answer questions and do summaries," adds classmate Eder.

"The way we understand more is that we do them on our own, so we have to think more. We think about the main idea and stuff," Zelina chimes in.

"Yeah," Eder nods in agreement. "We learn about the books."

These savvy students are right. At this tiny school tucked into the rolling fields and farms on the outskirts of Salem, reading class *is* different. As one of 20 Oregon schools selected to participate in the federal Comprehensive School

Reform Demonstration program (CSRD), Lake Labish is rethinking staff roles, revamping programs, and recharging classrooms one subject at a time. Reading is only the beginning.

A longtime Title I school with subpar student performance, dismal test scores, and 70 percent high-poverty students, Lake Labish is no stranger to school improvement efforts. Multiage, blended classrooms, mandatory uniforms, and a modified schedule testify to a school that is continually striving to meet its students' needs. But the CSRD program's additional funds and its comprehensive approach—which revitalizes the entire school instead of prescribing piecemeal changes—are giving Lake Labish a much-needed jolt of adrenaline to power it down the improvement path.

"To me, that's the difference," says Principal Ana Biffle. "CSRD steps up the rigor. Before, we might have been headed down this path, but it was at a more self-proclaimed pace and really with the direction of the district. Now I think the stakes are higher. If you look at human nature, there is a certain sense of direction and focus that sometimes doesn't come until we get put in a situation where it's fish or cut bait."

Working from a Can-Do Attitude

For Biffle, who spends half her days as principal at Lake Labish and half coordinating Title I programs for the Salem-Keizer district, "cutting bait" is never an option. This energetic, optimistic leader refuses to give up on the 112 K-5 students in her charge. Her staff draws strength from her confidence.

"Ana, she's a mover and a shaker," says teacher Jim Griffin. "Instead of saying, 'No, there are too many obstacles, too many problems, we can't do that,' she looks at the possibilities and says, 'Well, what would we have to do in order to make this work?'"

The school's new reading program is a case in point. This year, reading ability dictated placement for all classrooms, and 90-minute reading blocks replaced traditional reading classes. Every morning, in every classroom, the same scene unfolds. Students in mixed-age ability groups split into smaller groups and rotate among four reading stations. At one, students read with the teacher and take part in a discussion. Two stations are skill centers where kids work independently on targeted reading skills (such as phonics or vocabulary) and writing activities (like

"SUCCESS FOR ALL IS QUITE PRESCRIPTIVE. I CAN TIRE OF IT, AND THAT'S JUST THE WAY IT GOES. BUT IF STUDENTS ARE LEARNING TO READ, THAT'S WHAT I WANT. I WANT WHATEVER IS GOING TO HELP THEM THE MOST."

sentences and summaries). Students work with an instructional assistant at the fourth station, either reading aloud as a group, or reading silently as the assistant works one-on-one with kids who need extra help.

Students who are a grade or more behind in reading are also tutored for 20 minutes each day. Instructional assistants or other free staff members work with two or three students at once, which means about 45 students get focused reading assistance daily. After six weeks of tutoring, kids are tested on oral reading and comprehension for two weeks. The school's "fluid ability groups" allow students to move out of tutoring and into progressively higher reading groups as they become stronger readers. Because the rotation structure is the same in every classroom, kids can move into another reading group without feeling lost.

For the reading blocks to work, Biffle had to adjust the schedule to allow for the large chunk of uninterrupted time. She also tightened school rules: During reading class there are no announcements, no assemblies, no pull-out programs, no field trips, and no visitors. Instructional assistants were pulled off other duties and assigned to a reading class so that kids could get ongoing attention and support from at least two adults. To keep the groups as small as possible, staff roles blurred as well. Every staff member who is certified to teach—the Title I team leader, the librarian, the Learning Resource Center teacher, even Biffle—works with a reading group.

This kind of effort and attitude are just what CSRD requires. Comprehensive reform streamlines every aspect of the school—leadership, curriculum, instruction, attitudes, resources, parent support, community involvement, and facilities—to create a climate where students flourish, teachers stay, and families feel welcome. Schools must take a good, hard look at themselves, and then be willing to do whatever it takes to cure what's ailing them. Because the process schools must go through to receive CSRD funding is so stringent, those that aren't truly committed to change need not apply.

In Oregon, the 130 lowest-performing Title I schools were eligible to apply for CSRD funding; of those, 66 submitted letters of intent. By early September, Lake Labish had submitted the first part of its application, the prequalification portion, to the state Department of Education. This was a series of indepth questions designed to gauge the school's level of readiness. How committed was the principal? Could the staff handle such an undertaking? Was the district supportive? From there, a team from the department visited the school to meet with Biffle, interview the staff, and talk with community members to make sure the school was a good candidate for reform.

Once that was determined, at least $50,000—the minimum for CSRD grants—was reserved for Lake Labish, as long as the school completed the second part of its application and followed the required steps.

Finding Answers Within Themselves

Staff spent the second half of the school year immersed in an extensive needs assessment—the most critical and challenging part of the application process. Using the nine key components of CSRD (see sidebar, Page 7) as a guide, they examined their current school improvement plan to identify where it was working and where it was falling short. They combed through test data and pored over performance detail, mined every classroom for the best books and materials, and met as a group to ask questions, voice concerns, and build enthusiasm.

"It forced us to take a look at ourselves in lots of different categories," Biffle explains. "Our instructional practices, our school climate, our divergent populations, how we were serving students, what we felt our shortcomings were, and what were our strengths. And out of that we came up with the key areas that we needed to focus on in our school."

Areas like reading surfaced, of course, but so did poor writing skills, weak math performance, widely varying teaching methodologies, and negligible parent involvement—all things the staff had long suspected but now, as a team, had confirmed.

So how is Lake Labish tackling these problems? The staff began by asking if they had the answer without a reform model, but they agreed that they needed some help. The CSRD program encourages schools to consider adopting well-researched reform models with solid evidence of success in turning low-performing schools around. These external reform models generally reorganize the entire school, often providing a new structure, materials, and extensive training and staff development. Implementing schoolwide models isn't cheap. But by blending CSRD funds and all categorical dollars —Title I, bilingual, migrant, and so forth—into one funding stream that feeds the entire school, schools can afford to sign on.

The school's CSRD core team—Biffle, Griffin, and kindergarten teacher Cindy Fetters—attended a district-sponsored showcase where different model developers explained their programs. Each team member was assigned a model or two to research, and then they presented their findings to the rest of the staff.

"Everybody, including both certified and classified staff, was there for the meeting," notes Fetters. "Because our staff is so small, we felt that everybody needed to be there to make the decision."

Getting 20 people to agree is not an easy task, but the staff voted unanimously to adopt a reform model called Success for All. No one was too surprised by the vote. The CSRD process takes time and tenacity. But by sticking with it, Lake Labish finally arrived at the answer. Because everyone participated and contributed, the entire staff believes Success for All is a good match for the school and is invested in the program.

Designed for prekindergarten through sixth-grade students, Success for All focuses on preventing reading problems before they have a chance to take root, and intervening swiftly when problems do arise. The model groups students by reading ability, assesses them every eight weeks, provides daily tutoring for first-graders, and emphasizes cooperative learning—all complements to Lake Labish's new reading program. It has a proven record of success with Title I students, and includes a program for English-language learners. It provides a schoolwide reading curriculum complete with aligned materials for every level, and a Family Support Team to increase parent involvement.

Critics of the model say it's too prescriptive and takes away teachers' freedom. But staff at Lake Labish aren't daunted. Fetters admits that she's not too excited about "being told how to say things and when to say them," but as a fairly new teacher, she feels she can use the guidance. And if Success For All helps her kids in reading, she believes it will help them in other subjects as well—subjects where she'll have more teaching freedom. Even Griffin, a veteran teacher who works with the school's strongest readers, welcomes Success for All's brass-tacks approach. He believes the school's old reading program was too general to move students along and significantly improve their reading. Says Griffin:

"Success for All is quite prescriptive. I can tire of it, and that's just the way it goes. But if students are learning to read, that's what I want. I want whatever is going to help them the most."

Lessons for the Long Haul

Although several big hurdles had been cleared by summer break—application done, funding approved—much work remains. The core team spent much of the summer in training for Success for All. And while the school's grant may be renewed for two more years, this won't happen unless student achievement improves dramatically. At some point, the money and the outside support will go away, and Lake Labish will be 100 percent responsible for maintaining its improvements.

But Biffle, inspired by the way her staff came together this year, believes that what the school learned from the CSRD process will keep it going. The staff learned that they could restructure programs, use time and resources more efficiently, and boost student performance. By improving the reading program on their own as they went through the application process, the staff proved that they were strong enough to change.

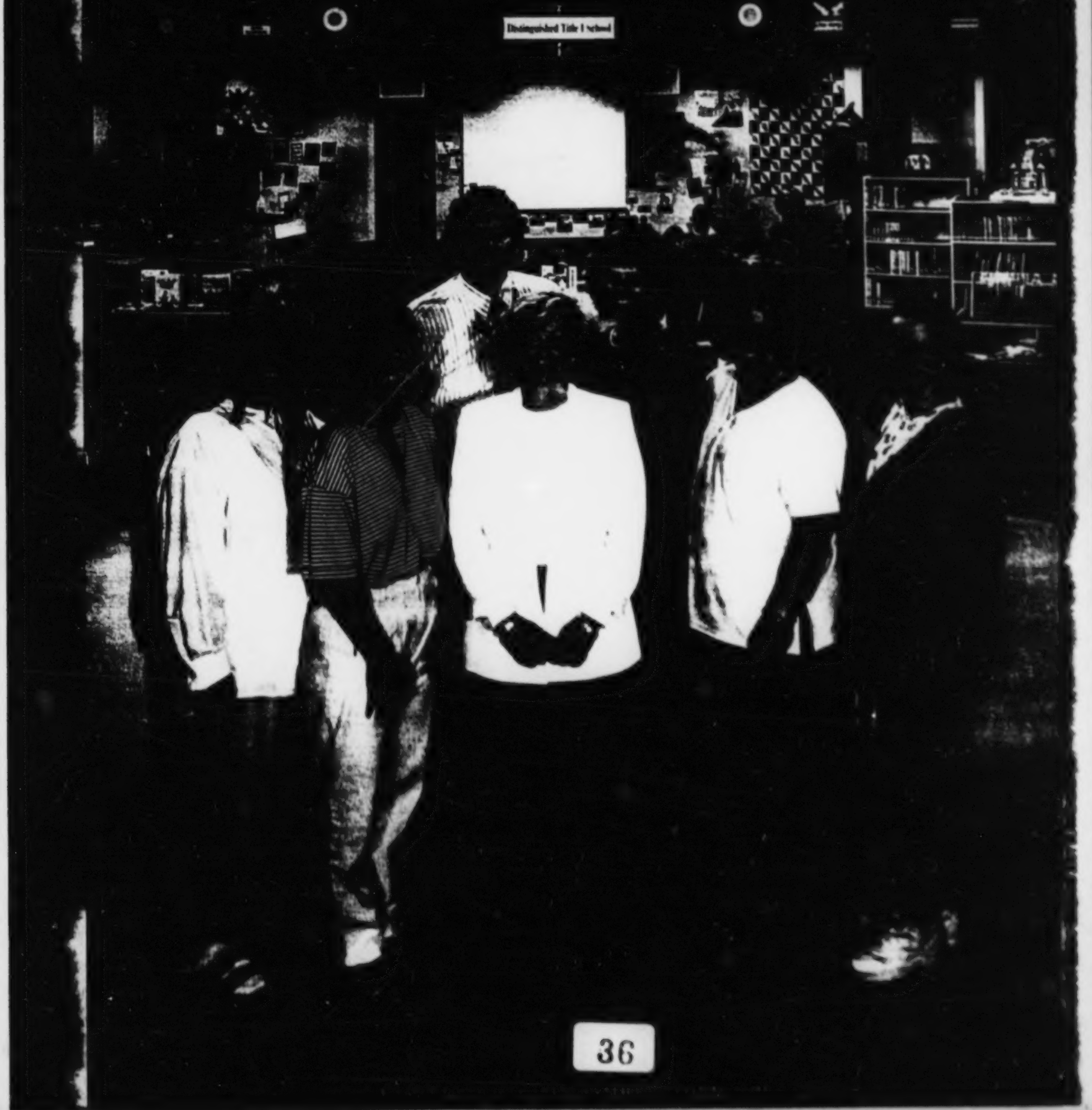
"CSRD is a really good, sound practice for taking a look at how you do business and how you utilize resources, against the backdrop of accountability and performance," Biffle stresses. "And, to me, there is no other discussion to have. I mean, I think that is why we wake up every day and come to work."

The extra help and funding that will come over the next three years should take Lake Labish to new levels of achievement. But the school has already learned its most valuable lessons from the CSRD program: That lasting change takes time and commitment. And that Lake Labish has plenty of both.

One Planet

[illegible] from around the world get a warm welcome at an award-winning school

By LEE SHERMAN


Distinguished Title I school

VANCOUVER, Washington— The visitor hadn't been in the building more than five minutes when she declared delightedly, "This is an international school!"

To this first-time visitor—a well-traveled photographer who's fluent in Spanish—the school's colorful mix of languages and cultures could only be a good thing. That's the way Principal Marianne Thompson sees it, too. Sure, serving kids from all over the planet in one place is tough. But, she says, think of the pluses: sharing cultures, learning languages, building bridges of understanding. Just the other day, she says, the school admitted the trilingual children of a Japanese father and a French mother.

"In a global economy," Thompson says, "where the whole world is just a keystroke away from anyplace, being bilingual or trilingual is a big advantage."

Remarkably, this six-year-old school with nearly 40 percent English-language learners, boasts rising test scores and dwindling discipline problems. By turning the conventional wisdom about risk factors on its head, Thompson and her staff at Eleanor Roosevelt Elementary have earned the Distinguished Title I School award from the U.S. Department of Education. Better yet, they've won the trust of a veritable UN of parents, whose passports originate in places as far-flung as Russia, Central and South America, Ukraine, Bosnia, Vietnam, Cambodia, India, Romania, China, Laos, and the Philippines.

Coming from countries where schools often are off-limits to parents, and principals are stern authority figures, these newcomers are astounded by Roosevelt's open arms. Translators guide parents through the school registration process in their native tongue—and invite them to visit their child's classroom any time. Teachers ask them to parent-teacher conferences—and call back to remind them. Thompson wears a T-shirt and shorts to the back-to-school hotdog feed—and lets kids toss a cream pie in her face.

"In Russia, you cannot throw pie at the *direktor*!" she observes with a wry smile.

Signs and banners reading "Welcome" in four languages hang everywhere—outward symbols of a schoolwide attitude that embraces kids and families from throughout the world community. Because of this welcome mat, parents turn out for school events in numbers that would make even some affluent suburban schools envious. Fully 93 percent of immigrant parents show up for parent-teacher conferences, accompanied by staff translators. PTA participation has quadrupled—from 30 to 120—in the four years since Roosevelt became a Title I Schoolwide program. Thompson, who took the principal's post that same year, says parents come for a simple reason: "We call them."

School-community liaison Evelyne Tumanoff, a native of France who speaks Russian as well as French and English, helps smooth the way for newcomers—not just at school but also in this neighborhood where modest apartments and tract homes have sprouted among small farms and open fields. One family lost their medical coupons, so Tumanoff "made a few phone calls." A mother needed a program for her four-year-old, so Tumanoff put her in touch with Head Start. She leads family field trips to museums and parks in nearby Portland. She smoothes over cultural misunderstandings ("From a little incident, you can have a mountain," she notes). And sometimes, she just holds the hands of anxious parents.

The personal touch is what the immigrant families like most about Roosevelt. A recent survey of non-native parents brought in 80 responses in every language—all positive. "The main thing they liked was the attention and respect from the teachers for their children, and the patience they have," says Tumanoff.

That personal attention and patience is possible because of the school's huge pool of paraprofessionals. An army of 25 staff assistants speaking at least four foreign languages backs up and supports the school's 36 certified teachers. Paid for by two large federal grants—$250,000 yearly for Title VII (English-language learners) and $200,000 yearly for Title I Schoolwide—the paraprofessionals work both inside and outside the classroom. In the classroom, they give native-language assistance to keep kids on target in content areas. Outside the classroom, they work with small groups, often previewing upcoming lessons and reading stories in English, going over spelling, pronunciation, meaning, and concepts.

"The staff assistants," says Thompson, "function sort of like a staff within a staff."

She identifies two keys to getting maximum benefit from paraprofessionals: One, they get lots of training in instructional strategies, and two, they work closely and cooperatively with the classroom teacher. "If a teacher and a Title I paraprofessional and a Title VII paraprofessional are planning together and coordinating materials and working in close proximity to the classroom," she says, "there's not a more powerful way to personalize instruction and lower that adult-to-child ratio."

Every Kid Counts

At 7:30 on a drizzly Friday morning, the school is quiet. The gleaming hallways, brightly hung with kids'

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: Digging In

> "We have an extremely hard-working staff. They have a positive we-can-do-it attitude. They don't wallow in 'Woe is me, we've got all these high-risk kids, what do we do?' but rather, 'OK, let's roll up our shirtsleeves and work.' There's this feeling of collaboration, of working together, that just permeates the school. They don't say, 'Oh, it's your problem.' They say, 'It's *our* student, and it's a difficulty for *all* of us. We need to work together on this.'"
>
> —Marilyn Wycoff
> School Psychologist

creations, are empty. The 700 students won't begin filling the building with sound and motion for another hour. But even at this early hour, the murmur of voices can be heard in the administrative offices where a small band of bleary-eyed staff members, clutching mugs of hot coffee, is already hard at work.

This team of teachers and administrators is doing what they do every Friday morning (and other days, too, if there's a backlog): seeking solutions for kids who aren't succeeding. In a school where 80 percent of kids live in poverty and close to half speak a first language other than English, there's never a shortage of struggling students. Last year, the team shared information and devised strategies for about 110 kids who weren't making it academically, behaviorally, or both.

Today, they have three names before them (changed here for privacy): Anton, Juanita, and Leo. As the team members—principal, psychologist, counselor, classroom teacher, Title VII specialist, Title I specialist, and staff assistant—trade bits of information, each child comes into focus as a whole person.

Anton, the youngest of a big extended family from rural Russia, has fallen far behind his fourth-grade classmates in spite of the intensive, small-group help he gets in reading and math daily. Even his native-language skills are weak—a red flag that could suggest a learning difficulty unrelated to second-language acquisition. During a test of Russian language development, he piled books around his desk to hide his answer sheet, and zipped through the 40-minute test in 15 minutes, marking the bubbles randomly. He's small for his age ("He's tiny, so tiny," says one staff member) and immature for his grade level. One day, when he was tripping on a shoelace, his teacher discovered he didn't know how to tie it. His family is loving and caring; the entire clan shows up for conferences. "He's our hope," Anton's mom once told a team member. But his home offers few opportunities for reading or writing practice.

Like Anton, Juanita is mired in learning problems, both in English and in Spanish, her native language. Born in an agrarian community in northern California, the fourth-grader is the unofficial translator for her single-parent household, using "Spanglish" sprinkled heavily with slang. She's also the fill-in mom—cooking, cleaning, and changing diapers for her younger siblings—when her mother's out, often late into the night. Frequently tardy ("She said she was up all night when the baby had an ear infection," a team member reports), Juanita struggles with math and literacy. Letter reversals continue to crop up in her writing—unusual for a child about to enter fifth grade. "She often writes the words completely backwards," someone observes. Already, she talks about dropping out of school.

Poised on the threshold of middle school, Leo is, like Anton, very small for his age and grade ("He's about as big as a peanut," the staff assistant observes). Examining the boy's cumulative file, the team discovers that a bureaucratic glitch bumped him from third to fifth grade when he entered Roosevelt last fall. The son of a medical interpreter who was a pediatrician in Russia, Anton is described by a team member as a "very sweet boy" who has encyclopedic retention of information but poor literacy and organizational skills ("He forgets his notebook and pencil, he forgets his coat," says a team member). He's the oldest of eight children, and his mother often keeps him home to help out.

After a spirited discussion that touches on every aspect of the children's home life and school experience, psychologist Marilyn Wycoff writes up the team's findings and a plan of action for each student. Among all English-language learners, she says, language difficulties can mask learning disorders. Sorting one from the other is dicey. Schools have to walk a delicate balance between overlooking learning disabilities and over-identifying language-minority students for special ed.

Anton and Juanita fall into that hazy place where language and learning troubles are jumbled. The team agrees that "there's something different about the way Anton's learning." They recommend tests to help pinpoint the problem: Is it a learning problem or overall immaturity? Depending on the results, they may recommend a special-education referral, retention, or some other intervention such as intensive, one-on-one instruction. In Juanita, the team also sees signs of a global learning problem. Without intervention, the girl will likely leave school at a young age. They agree to arrange for thorough native-language testing to help clarify her needs.

PHOTO BY JUDY BLANKENSHIP

As for Leo, the group agrees he's "a slam-dunk" for retention. In Russia, students move up only when they've mastered the material, a team member notes. They think Leo's folks will agree to hold him back to catch up.

This early-morning group, officially called the "Screening Team," has a critical mission: To keep kids from slipping through the cracks of the system. At Roosevelt, no child goes unnoticed. Most students the team discusses don't qualify for special-ed referral. But they need something extra. Maybe it's family counseling. Or more time with a staff assistant. Or tutoring from a volunteer.

"We look at every possibility," says Title VII Coordinator Katrina Walla, a native of Moscow who has teaching endorsements in ESL, Russian, and bilingual education. "Sometimes extra time, individually, makes all the difference."

From Russia With Hope

Second-grader Yelena Kovlenka perches on a tall stool in one corner of the classroom, her smooth forehead furrowed in concentration. "Beluga, beluga," she says aloud to herself, flipping through the pages of a hefty library book, *Whales: The Nomads of the Sea*. "I can't find beluga whales."

Teacher Anita Chase, wearing the crisp captain's hat she sports during the ocean unit, leans over the little girl. "Let's look in the index," Chase suggests. The teacher guides Yelena to the chapter she needs.

"Ahh!" Yelena says. She reads eagerly. "Beluga. No dorsal fin. Lives in the icy Arctic. Eats fish and—what is this word?" she asks a staff assistant who's cruising the room, helping out where needed.

"Squid," the assistant reads.

"Squid," Yelena continues, "and bottom-dwelling ...." Stuck again on a prickly word, she looks at the assistant.

"Crustaceans," she says. "Those are shellfish like shrimps and crabs."

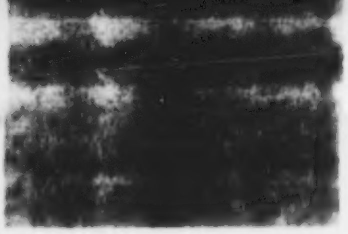
Watching the little girl with red woolen leggings and a blond ponytail soak up facts from the reference book, you'd never guess English is her second language. She didn't know a word, in fact, just three years ago when she and her parents Yekaterina and Andrey arrived in the U.S. from the Black Sea resort town of Gelendzhik—a popular vacation spot where her dad worked construction and her mom grew and tended the flowers that festoon the city in summer. Afraid for their child's future in a country rocked by economic and political unrest, the couple decided to emigrate. They joined relatives in Vancouver, where a fast-growing Russian community has taken hold.

The Russian-speaking staff at Eleanor Roosevelt Elementary—the school attended by three of Yelena's cousins—welcomed the family warmly. Still, her parents worried as they sent their only child off to school in a new land.

"For a week, I couldn't do my work at home," Yekaterina confesses in Russian. But her nerves quieted down quickly.

"Yelena has liked school since the first day," her mother reports. "She cried when she got sick and couldn't go to school."

Like all the language-minority kids at Roosevelt, Yelena was a part of the mainstream classroom "from the very first day," says Title VII Coordinator Katrina Walla. The native-language support from staff assistants, both in the classroom and in small pullout groups, is what Yelena's mother likes best about the school. "Sometimes the Russian children don't understand the content in English," she says. "But they don't get behind because it is being explained to them in their native language."



After three years at Roosevelt, Yelena is bilingual. She shifts easily from language to language: One moment she's reading scientific terms in English. The next, she's whispering to her less-fluent friend Anna, translating an assignment (or the day's lunch menu) into Russian.

Ask Yelena what subject she likes best, and she'll hem and haw, knitting her brow as she thinks it over.

"I like math." Pause. "I like reading, too." Pause. "I like research. And science!"

As for her aspirations, she says "maybe a doctor, maybe a teacher—I don't know."

There are so many choices —and that's just the point of coming to America.

"Here, if she studies well and works hard," her mother says, "she can achieve anything she wants to achieve. In Russia, doctors and teachers are almost starving. I didn't see any opportunities for my child over there."

—Lee Sherman

For one antsy little boy on a soggy spring day, a middle school mentor is just what's needed. When the lanky eighth-grader strides into the second-grade classroom, a chorus of little voices calls out, "Cory! Cory! Cory!" and a half-dozen pairs of little feet hurry toward the long-legged teenager. The teacher steers the young tutor to Javier, an energetic, talkative boy who's been off-task all morning. Clearly wowed by getting this celebrity all to himself, Javier (a pseudonym) settles right down to work with Cory, composing a verse for a traditional song called "Down by the Bay," where you might see "a goose kissing a moose," "a bear combing his hair," or "a whale with a polka-dot tail."

In the Mainstream

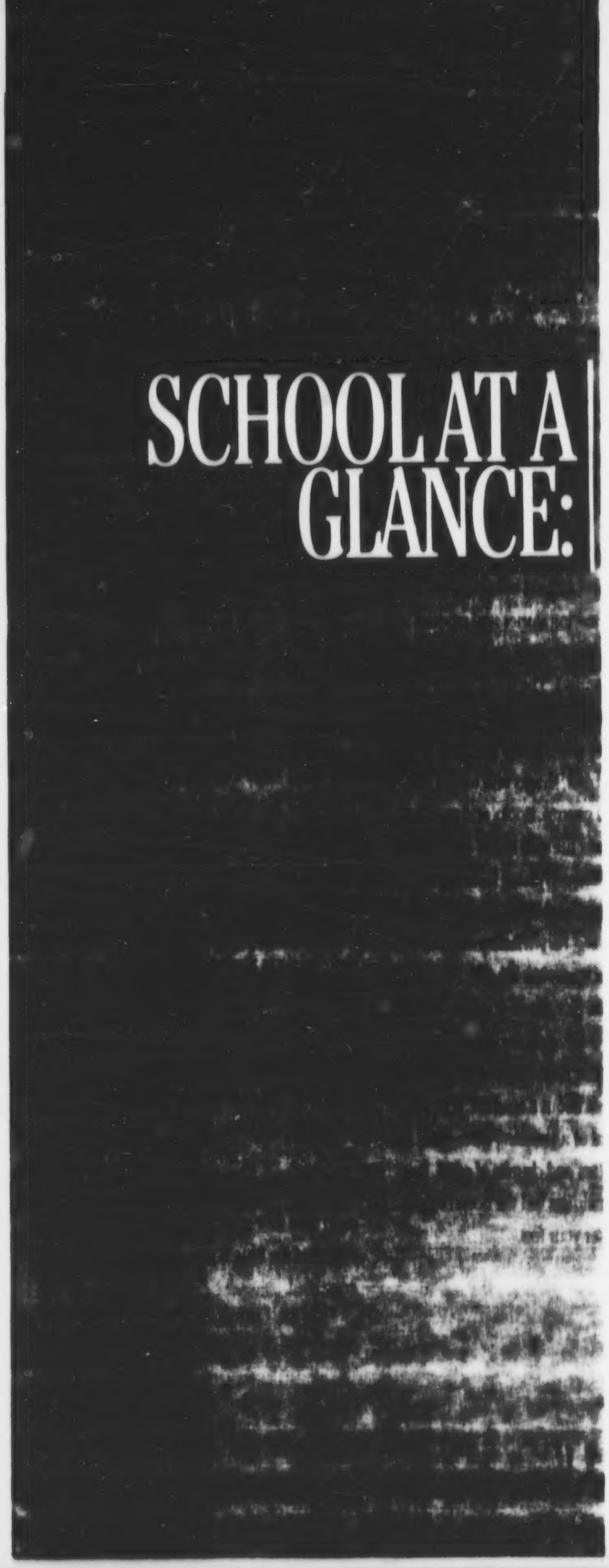
When Anita Chase's second-graders arrive on that wet morning in May, their classroom is no longer just plain-old Room 10. A colorful sign on the door tells them they're entering Anita's Adventure Tours, offering "scientific excursions" to exotic places around the globe. Every kid's a scientist, equipped with a "duffel bag" (a khaki-colored paper folder for storing stories and reports) and a travel journal (to log the day's activities). The room bursts with ocean imagery: Cut-out sea creatures swim across the walls—squid and eels, sharks and turtles, puffins and murres. Books and magazines on sea life spill out of shelves and bins—everything from lighthearted picture books like *Humphrey, the Wrong-Way Whale* to serious reference books like *Whales: The Nomads of the Sea*. Oceanic vocabulary words are chalked on the board: Atlantic, Pacific, Arctic, Indian. There's a poem about a seashell. A Japanese print of a breaking wave. Real sand dollars and chunks of coral. You can almost feel the ocean swells under your feet.

Splitting into groups with names like Tiger Sharks and Killer Whales, students team up for ocean-related activities as they travel the world on imaginary ships. Some kids use rubber stamps of starfish and sea horses to create an underwater scene, and then write a story to go with it. Other kids research incredible creatures like puffer fish and bandit pipefish, then try to stump their classmates with riddles ("I'm spiky; I blow up; what am I?" or "I'm skinny; I'm red, black, and yellow; I'm poisonous; what am I?") Still others write original verses to "Down by the Bay," and then type them into the computer. As they work, they move through the classic divisions of the curriculum—science, geography, reading, writing, music, art, technology—like a dolphin slices through saltwater.

Chase, in a white captain's hat, circulates among the groups, keeping kids on task, moderating disputes, pulling in wayward students.

The groups flow out of the classroom, spreading their art supplies and reference books into the common area that adjoins the six classrooms of the Blue Wing. Everyone's engrossed.

SCHOOL AT A GLANCE:



Grade Configuration

- Single-grade groupings are "looped" for two years (students stay with one teacher for grades two and three, and for grades four and five)

Curriculum

- Vancouver School District adopted the Silver Burdett Ginn (SBG) reading curriculum two years ago
- The school supplements SBG with Reading Recovery
- It recently adopted Compass Curriculum Manager software from Jostens Learning Corporation

Title I

- Staff assistants get daily training in instructional strategies from Title I Coordinator Cheryl Huerena
- The Title I Reading Room, stocked with supplementary materials at all levels, is open to all staff; many materials are organized by theme in a computer database
- The Title I coordinator oversees a number of volunteer activities for needy kids, including the Kids Care and Heros projects, which bring middle school and high school kids in as mentors and tutors

Language Support

- To help the Russian students—the school's largest language-minority group—meet state standards, Title VII Coordinator Katrina Walla is translating materials and test instruments into Russian
- Language-minority kids are part of the classroom from the first day under the school's inclusive approach
- Newcomers get literacy instruction in their native language, as well as in English; staff assistants who speak Vietnamese and Bosnian, as well as Russian and Spanish, are among the 25 aides
- All correspondence for parents is translated
- Many teachers are working toward ESL endorsements through the Center for Professional Development at Washington State University

Extended Hours

- Staff are at school 10 hours weekly beyond the regular school day to give kids extra chances for learning
- An after-school Homework Club in the Title I Reading Room is open to all students
- A Saturday morning Learning Center offers English-language instruction for families

Magnet School

- The school pulls in gifted students through its Challenge magnet program
- It serves students with special needs in its Special Education Kindergarten magnet program

So no one notices when a staff assistant gently taps two Russian girls on the shoulder and leads them to a nearby cubbyhole for a half-hour preview of an upcoming lesson. Or when another aide motions to a Hispanic boy, who gets some one-on-one reading practice at a table just outside the classroom. When the students finish their separate lessons, they glide back into the group activity with scarcely a ripple.

Wrapping the curriculum around a broad theme (in this case, Environmental Wonders) and splitting kids into groups for projects creates a fluid setting, full of motion and flexibility. Students can come and go without missing other important lessons or disrupting other students—two of the big criticisms of the traditional pullout. And with lots of nooks and niches within feet of the classroom, kids remain closely tied to mainstream activities even while they're getting individual help. Since staff assistants stroll around the room, helping any child who needs a boost, there's no stigma to being singled out.

Flexible Flyers

When Eleanor Roosevelt Elementary opened in 1993, 50 non-English speakers enrolled. Six years later, with immigrants pouring in from Bosnia, Russia, and Ukraine, that number had swollen sixfold.

"There was this huge shift," says Thompson. "So people were hungry to find a process to make it work—to bring *really* diverse groups of kids together in a cohesive whole that made sense."

They're still ironing out the kinks. But that's one of the school's strengths: flexibility. The flexibility to adapt and adjust. To rethink decisions, tweak the system, constantly push for improvement.

"Every year in the spring," says Thompson, "we look at what's working, what's not working, what we need to focus on. Then we set goals for the next year. We didn't just fix it and go with it. Every year we revisit it." ■

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: Going Outside the Box

Staff members credit Principal Marianne Thompson for expertly guiding the school toward excellence. Thompson led another Distinguished Title I School before coming to Roosevelt. Here are some staff comments:

- "She's an excellent listener."
- "She has this problem-solving ability that is a gift—the ability to see novel ways of solving problems, not being afraid to go outside the box."
- "She's on top of everything."
- "She knows where teachers are coming from. She's real respectful of everybody's individual style of teaching."
- "She's open to ideas, to everyone's input."
- It's nice knowing that no matter what happens, she's going to be there to back me up."
- "She's there for *us*."

DIALOGUE

AN INVITATION TO OUR READERS

With the publication of the following letter from one of our readers, we hope to initiate a regular column devoted to your thoughts and ideas on the world of education. Our wish is to open a spirited dialogue on these pages, where you can trade opinions and share promising practices with your colleagues around the Northwest and beyond.

Topics we feature in the magazine are just a jumping-off place. We'd also like to hear about other issues you confront in your day-to-day working lives. The letter below grew out of our Spring 1999 magazine on school safety, but takes a unique turn into a novel aspect of the subject—one we didn't touch on in the publication.

Write to us! You may send your letters by e-mail to shermanl@nwrel.org. Or you may send them by traditional mail to:

The Editors
Northwest Education Magazine
Northwest Regional
Educational Laboratory
101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 500
Portland, Oregon 97204

We hope to hear from you.

Lee Sherman, Editor
Suzie Boss, Associate Editor

Camouflage Day: A Hidden Agenda?

Dear Readers:
An interesting and challenging part of our middle school's yearly planning involves the Associated Student Body's promotion of "Spirit Week," where each day, students dress according to a theme.

Not only does the whole idea create some controversy within the staff (with some maintaining that the ensuing excitement detracts from the learning process, and others claiming that it promotes a shared identification with and loyalty to the school), but also the suggested themes for dress up have created some disagreement.

For example, a day when students could dress in camouflage was variously seen as honoring relatives who had served in the armed forces or as promoting an underlying theme of aggression and violence. Other themes might result in more noise than usual or in the use of clothes and body decorations (such as glitter spray) which could be toxic.

I would be interested in getting a dialogue going about this issue. What are other schools doing? Have any of you designed such a week around promoting positive, peaceful themes? What do you see as the pitfalls and advantages of special dress days?

Marilyn Firth, Counselor
Jefferson Middle School
Jefferson, Oregon 97352

Send your responses by e-mail to shermanl@nwrel.org or by traditional mail to The Editors (address above).

Running Out of Ink

Dear Editor:
I discovered your magazine by chance. I feel so fortunate to have done so. I have printed so many articles my printer may blow up or certainly run out of ink! I have found the magazine as a whole to be both educational and useful. Your words echo many of my thoughts and concerns as an educator, art therapist, artist, and writer. I am forwarding your Web address to my colleagues. Thank you for a fantastic, informative publication.

Sally Brannon, Counselor
Mayo, South Carolina

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Winter issue
Urban Education, Northwest-Style

Spring issue
The Principal's Role in School Reform

Summer issue
Professional Development: Making Good Teachers Better

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identify places where good things are happening,
provide descriptions of effective techniques being used,
suggest useful resources, and submit letters to the editor.

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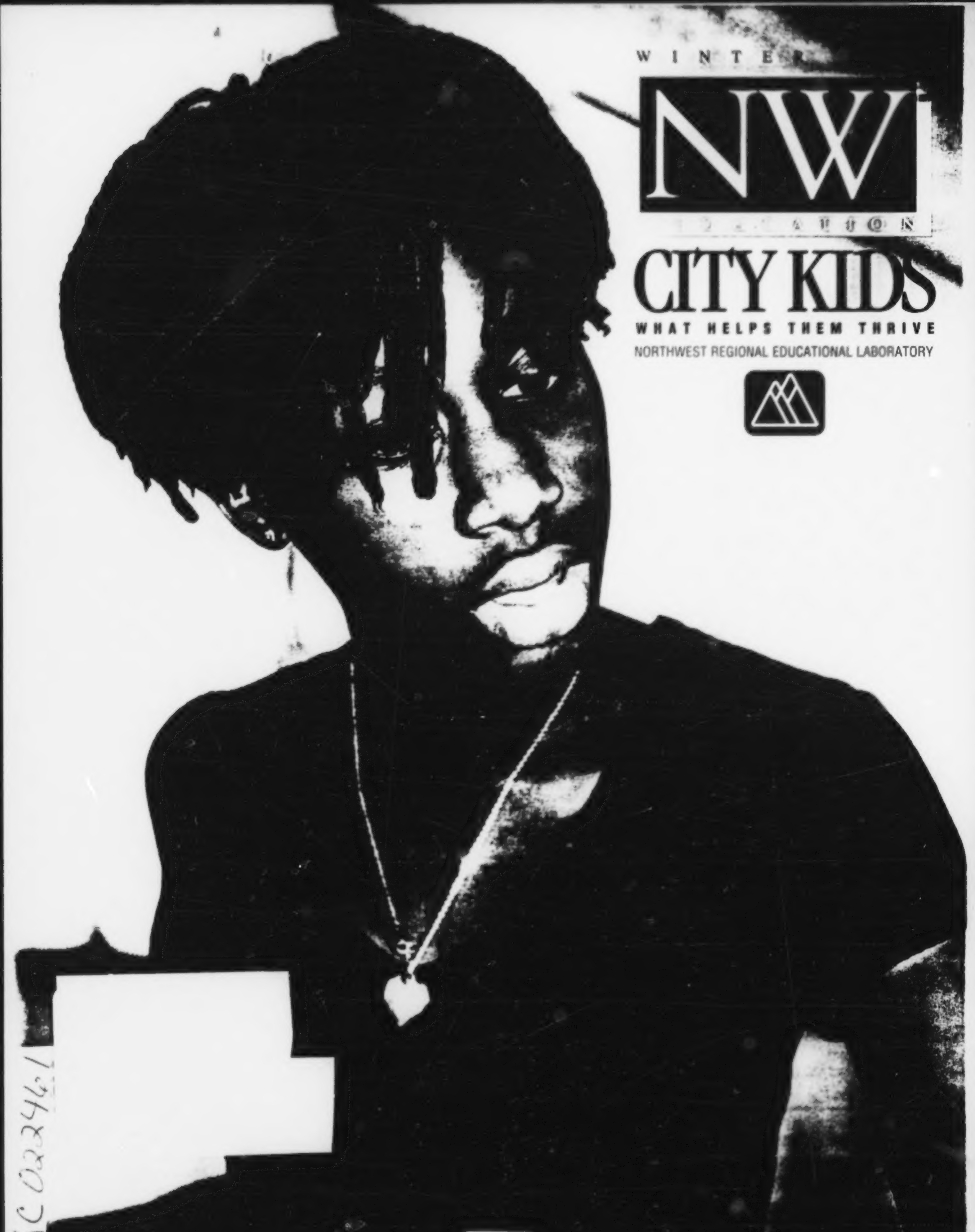

WINTER

NW

EDUCATION

CITY KIDS

WHAT HELPS THEM THRIVE

NORTHWEST REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY

KC 022461

VOLUME 5 NUMBER 2
WINTER 1999

ON THE COVER:
Welcome to Anchorage, a Northwest city that attracts new residents from all over the world. Yagga Touray, pictured here, relocated with her family from West Africa two years ago and is now an eighth-grader at Clark Middle School.
PHOTOGRAPH BY DENISE JARRETT

City Kids
What Helps Them Thrive

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Ben Canada works 'round the clock to bring Portland Public Schools back to health.

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In a poor neighborhood of Seattle, an extraordinary gift gives children a chance at success.

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Recruiters invite adventurous teachers to consider Anchorage, where students speak 85 languages and wilderness is a mountaintop away.

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Tony Hopson gives children what they need to thrive in a community where hope has been in short supply.

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"Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul—and sings . . ."

mily Dickinson was hip to hope more than a century ago. These days, as the parent of a high school senior who will graduate in a new millennium, I'm familiar with the fluttering feeling of hope, too.

s I watch my son spread his wings, I take comfort in knowing that he has been well served, these past dozen years, by an urban school system. He's been guided by many competent teachers and a few stellar ones. His public high school, sitting on the edge of downtown Portland, routinely produces graduates who not only go on to some of the best colleges in the nation, but thrive there. So there's plenty of reason for optimism.

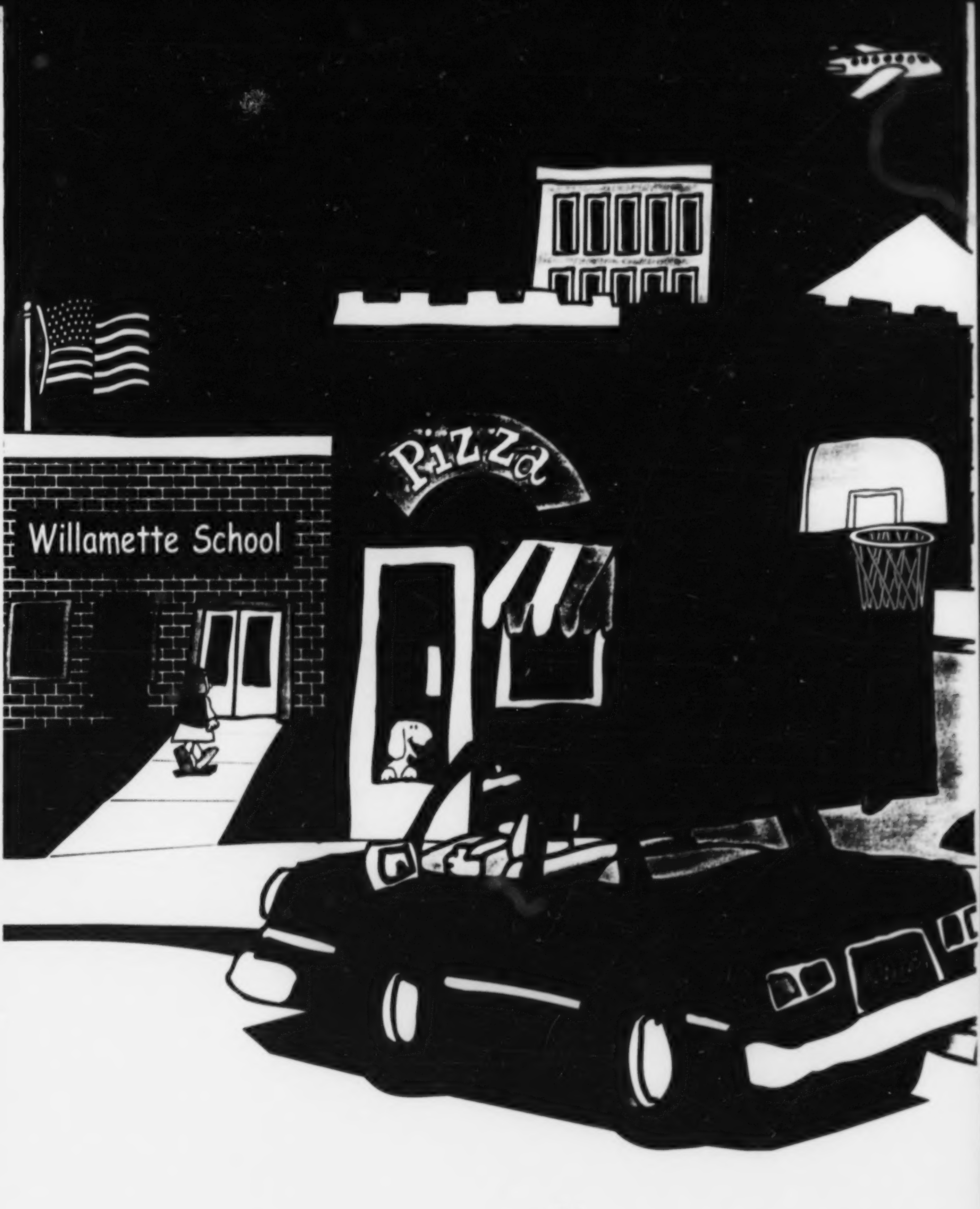
cross the country, and even in our own corner of the continent, city schools don't always fare so well. I often hear friends who are raising their children in Los Angeles or New York fret about private tuition and rigorous admissions tests for high schools, elementary schools, and even preschools. Why? Because they have lost hope in their public schools.

n this issue devoted to urban education, Northwest-style, we've deliberately sought to tell stories with a positive spin. It's not that we're blind to the struggles facing many city schools, or ignorant of the hardships of families in impoverished urban neighborhoods. Rather, we're taking a cue from what research and teacher anecdotes reveal: Building on the strengths of city kids is the approach most likely to help them thrive, even if they face challenges at home, in their communities, or in the classroom.

ere, then, is a collection of hopeful stories from throughout the region. You'll meet a big-city superintendent who's an unabashed cheerleader for urban schools. You'll hear about a millionaire who's investing in the education of some of his community's poorest students. You'll read about the creative ways one urban district is recruiting new teachers, reminding them that, in the spectacular Northwest, "wilderness is only a mountaintop away." You'll visit a community program that puts its arms around children to shelter them from risks and help them achieve academic success.

long the way, you'll meet some remarkable city kids. Many were born in the Northwest, others have traveled around the globe to make their home here. Their ideas and energy should give all of us reason to stay hopeful about the future.

Suzie Boss
bosss@nwrel.org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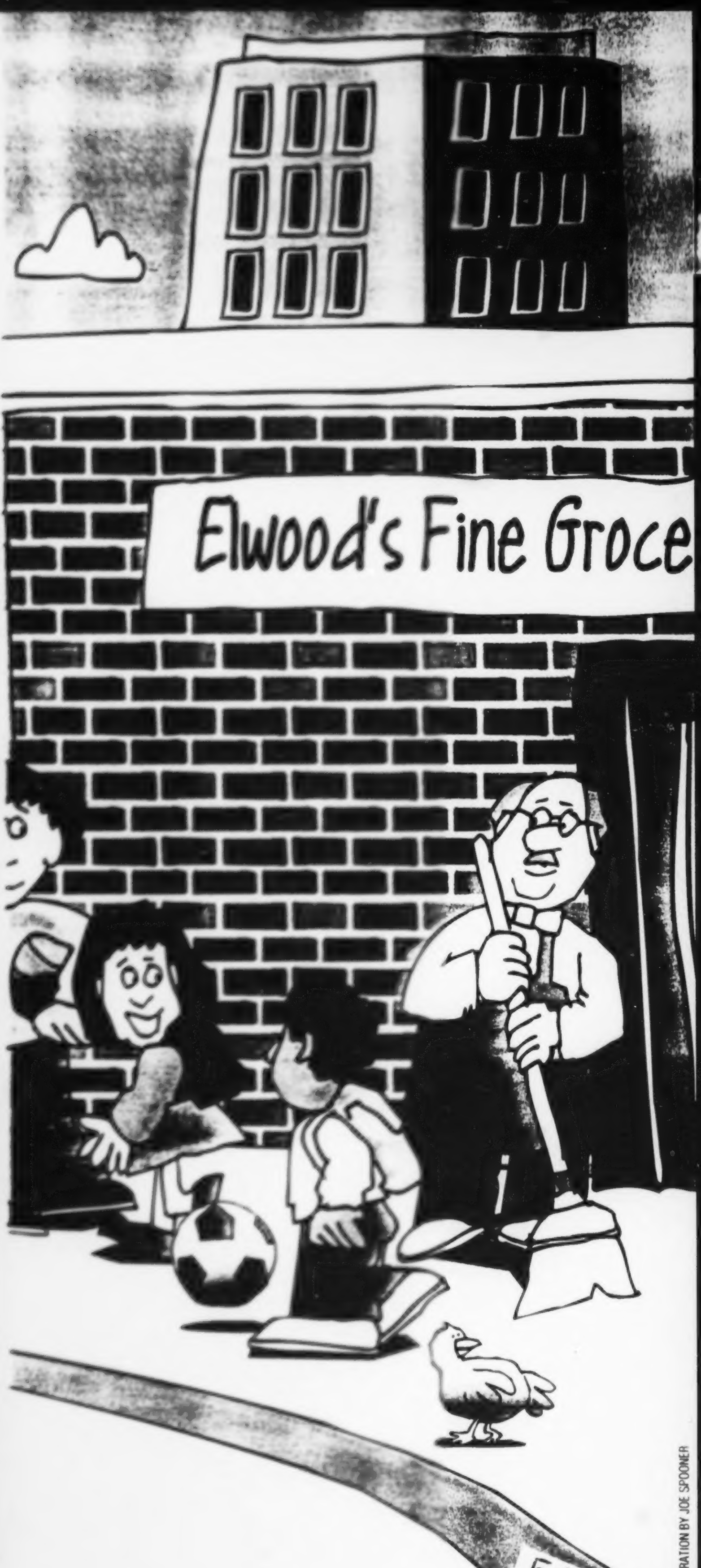


ILLUSTRATION BY JOE SPOONER

LESSONS FROM THE CITIES

URBAN SCHOOLS FIND WAYS TO BUILD ON THE STRENGTHS OF CITY KIDS

BY SUZIE BOSS

Soon after he was elected mayor of Chicago in 1989, Richard M. Daley started hearing a disturbing rumor: "Nobody cares about our schools." He didn't have to look far to find supporting evidence. The Chicago district had been rocked by strikes, budget crises, fiscal mismanagement. School bond issues had failed. Although a major school reform effort was already underway, the high school dropout rate was approaching 50 percent.

"People had lost faith. If we didn't change the schools, nobody would be here," the mayor told a conference of the Education Writers of America (EWA) in Chicago earlier this year. "There would be no one left to teach. The young families were moving out. If this was going to be a city for all, we had to do something." In 1995, the state legislature agreed to give Daley control of the [illegible],000-student district. His hand-picked reformers introduced changes intended to boost achievement, improve accountability, encourage teachers to try new ideas to help students learn, and increase parent involvement at the local school level.

Chicago children have responded positively. Standardized test scores have been rising steadily. The pool of students performing at the bottom continues to shrink. More families are moving back to the city

4 The ambitious approach to school reform has earned widespread attention as the "Chicago Model."

Similar stories are starting to play out in other big cities. In Boston, Newark, Cleveland, Detroit, Baltimore, and elsewhere, failing urban school districts have been wrested from local boards by state legislatures, courts, and mayors. Although specifics vary from one city to the next, the goals everywhere are similar: Help children achieve higher academic standards. Restore public confidence in schools. Prevent flight to the suburbs. As Boston Mayor Thomas Benino told the EWA gathering, "We're finally dealing with an issue that people have walked away from for years." In April, when Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer took over his city's troubled schools, he told *Time*, "The No. 1 issue facing cities isn't crime or jobs anymore, it's public education."

Suddenly, it seems, everybody cares about city schools and city kids. "The heat is on" in urban districts, acknowledges Paul T. Hill of the University of Washington and author of *Fixing Urban Schools*, published in 1998. The recent upheavals in urban school districts, he writes, "are intended to break political gridlock, lessen the iron grip of bureaucratic routine, and make room for people who might have new ideas."

A national invitational conference on urban education last year underscored the importance of these recent efforts to improve city schools. Although participants engaged in spirited debates about the best solutions, "There was a consensual sense of urgency for advancing the current momentum to achieve reform success," report Margaret C. Wang and Herbert J. Walbert in their conference summary, *Education in Cities: What Works and What Doesn't*.

From the vantage point of the Northwest, it's tempting to view these takeovers and makeovers as dramas that play out only in bigger cities with bigger problems. The Northwest, after all, regularly earns praise for its livable, progressive cities. Many urban districts in the region are making steady progress on academic measurements, and some individual schools regularly produce exceptional results. The challenges facing a mega-district like New York, with a million students, or Detroit, where last year there were 1,000 vacancies on the teaching staff, seem a world removed from the classrooms of Anchorage, Boise, or Portland.

Even though the Northwest's largest urban districts operate on a smaller scale, they are no strangers to challenges. Portland has struggled to maintain quality in the face of a long-term funding crisis. Anchorage must attract teachers able to work with diverse students who speak an estimated 85 languages. Seattle battles persistent achievement gaps between White and minority, rich and poor students. "Any city over 100,000 needs to pay attention to its schools," cautions Chicago's Mayor Daley. Today's city kids, for better or worse, will shape the future of America's cities.

Ideas about urban education are often transplanted from one city to another when leadership changes. Before Rudy Crew took over as chancellor of New York schools in 1995, for example, he was superintendent in Tacoma, Washington, where he put the 31,939-student district on the path to reform.

Two years ago, Arlene Ackerman left Seattle to take on the challenge of turning around schools in Washington, D.C. Friends and colleagues from her 30-year career in education tried to warn her away from the task. In Seattle, after all, she was second-in-command to then-superintendent John Stanford. The retired army general was making progress on his promise to create a system of "world-class schools" on Puget Sound. In the D.C. district, Ackerman found all the ills of urban schools, only greatly exaggerated: physically unsafe facilities, schools that had failed to open on time for three years running, students performing well below grade level, a shortage of qualified teachers, and a burdensome central office bureaucracy.

But as Ackerman has settled into her new job, she

"…we have not given up on our big-city schools and you shouldn't either. Optimism fuels action, and action fuels progress. The more Americans believe this, the more victories we will have in our urban classrooms."

—Michael Casserly
Executive Director,
Council of the Great
City Schools, in
USA Today

has remembered John Stanford's sage advice. Although the popular Seattle superintendent died last year, the lessons that he taught about how to educate city kids continue to ring true—from the Northwest all the way to the nation's capital. "Start with a vision that anyone can embrace. Articulate a plan for change. *And you must not make excuses.*" City kids can't afford to wait.

The Strengths of City Kids

When the recess bell rings at Maple Elementary in Seattle, 400 children spill onto the playground. Principal Eleanor Weisenbach watches her students navigate the tight space. On a single ball field, they manage to squeeze in three games by sharing bases. The same thing happens over on the blacktop, where what looks like room for one foursquare game is plenty big for several. Sharing is a way of life that many of these children learned first in places like China, the Philippines, or Somalia before their families settled on the south side of Seattle. After recess, when Weisenbach peers into classrooms, she sees more good qualities: Students on task, self-directed, self-disciplined. "I see this as a real strength," she says. There are struggles, to be sure, in teaching students whose families are largely poor and may speak little English. Yet for Weisenbach and her teachers, "It's a joy to be here every day."

Building on the strengths of city kids, rather than tallying up their weaknesses, takes a fundamental shift in thinking about urban education. But it's a shift that makes sense to researchers, classroom teachers, and administrators who already know plenty about the challenges facing the children of America's cities.

More than 150 languages are now spoken in America's public schools, a reflection of recent immigration trends. City schools enroll the lion's share of these newest Americans. Is this diversity a strength or an obstacle to learning? If seen as a deficit, immigrant students' limited English skills can look like one more burden for urban districts to bear. Taken as a talent, however, children's "multilingual abilities may one day give them a distinct advantage in the global marketplace," points out R. Craig Sautter in *CITYSCHOOLS*, a publication of the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. Urban schools, concludes Sautter, "need to develop strategies that build aggressively on the real capacities, experiences, culture, and linguistic attributes of city kids." Such strategies start by thinking of urban children as "of value" rather than "at risk," suggests former Philadelphia superintendent Constance Clayton in *City Kids, City Teachers: Reports from the Front Row*.

For decades, researchers have been documenting the deficits of urban students and the social ills of the inner cities. Across the country, including the largest cities of the Northwest, achievement gaps remain especially glaring for low-income minority youth. Complex social and economic reasons have left many of these children increasingly isolated from middle-class students and from successful schools, according to *Trends and Issues in Urban Education, 1998*, a report from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education. City kids attending high-poverty schools, according to the ERIC report, tend to have limited exposure to rigorous coursework and experienced teachers—two key factors for boosting achievement.

According to *Urban Schools: The Challenge of Location and Poverty*, a 1996 report from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), students and teachers in urban schools have "greater challenges to overcome in a number of areas compared to their suburban and rural counterparts, even when the higher concentration of poverty in urban schools is considered." *Education Week's Quality Counts, 1998*, reports that academic performance is worst in urban schools where the majority of students are poor.

At home, in their neighborhoods, and in school, many city kids do face obstacles that can interfere with learning. It's a long list, according to NCES, and includes health, family, economic, and social factors that extend well beyond the classroom. Compared with rural and suburban children, urban students are more likely to be exposed to safety and health risks and less likely to receive regular medical care. They're more likely to be victims of crime. They're more apt to engage in risk-taking behaviors outside of school and more likely to be disruptive while in class. They're less likely to attend schools with talented and gifted programs and more likely to be identified as having learning or emotional disabilities. Despite their academic needs, city kids are more likely to be taught by inexperienced teachers. They're more likely to live with only one parent, and their parents tend to be less educated than the parents of children in the suburbs. City kids have less access to computers and the Internet but watch television more than children in suburban or rural places.

Although America's cities are "the strongest they have been in a decade," according to a 1998 *State of the Cities* report from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, poverty remains more concentrated in distressed urban areas and affects a disproportionate share of minority families. "When asked why people are leaving cities," the report relates, "two answers most commonly cited are the poor quality of urban schools and the relatively high rates of urban crime."

Without ignoring these challenges, however, more and more educators are asking a question intended to help all city kids, whether they go to school in Detroit or Portland, New York or Anchorage: What can schools do to help students *thrive* in the urban neighborhoods where they live and learn?

Researchers at the Center for Education in the Inner Cities (CEIC), a project of the Laboratory for Student Success at Temple University, are focusing on educational resilience as a key to helping urban students succeed—even if they live in neighborhoods beset by social and economic woes. "Although not forgetting for a moment the details, complexity, and history of the problems cities face," relates the CEIC impact report, *Next Steps in Inner-City Education*, "researchers focus on the 'positives' of inner-city life, the vast resource of the cities, and, most important, the resilience and potential of inner-city children and youth."

Bonnie Benard, who has written widely on the topic of resiliency, reports that "new rigorous research" supports nurturing the strengths of urban youth rather than targeting services to overcome their deficits. Teachers have the power "to tip the scale from risk to resilience," she writes in *Turning It Around for All Youth*, a 1997 ERIC Digest. Benard cites three school-related factors that have the power to transform city kids' lives:

- Caring relationships with teachers who demonstrate kindness, respect, and understanding
- Positive and high expectations, which can challenge students beyond what they believe they can do and help them not see setbacks as pervasive
- Opportunities to participate and contribute, which allow students to express their opinions, solve problems, and help others

From a mental health perspective, too, it makes sense "to promote strategies of resilience to overcome the challenge of urban life for children, their families, and communities," conclude Maureen M. Black and Ambika Krishnakumar in the June 1998 *American Psychologist*. Affluent families, the authors point out, have the financial clout "to enjoy the benefits and avoid the negative aspects of cities." Parents with means can foot the bill for private tuition or pay for extras to supplement public school offerings. In wealthy north Seattle, for instance, only 65 percent of school-aged children attend public schools compared with 90 percent on the less affluent south side of the

"A successful city neighborhood is a place that keeps sufficiently abreast of its problems so it is not destroyed by them."

Jane Jacobs,
The Death and Life of Great American Cities

city, according to the *Post-Intelligencer.* Middle-income families have sheltered their children from perceived city ills by moving to the suburbs, where public schools typically enjoy higher parental involvement, serve a more homogeneous population, and can often afford to offer higher salaries to attract more experienced teachers and principals.

For the families left behind, the daily stress of life in an urban neighborhood where poverty is widespread "can be likened to the effects of toxic chemicals on physical health," report Abraham Wandersman and Maury Nation in *American Psychologist* (June 1998). And yet, Wandersman and Nation add, "urban neighborhoods can have positive and life-enhancing effects." Within their schools and communities, city kids can find "key factors that contribute to resilience."

Deborah Meier, the gifted educator who founded Central Park East schools in Harlem and wrote about her experience in *The Power of Their Ideas,* has seen firsthand the transformation that can happen when urban schools work well, "inspiring students with the desire to know more." Teachers who launched the Central Park East experiment were motivated by questions of equity, Meier relates: How could the children at the bottom of America's social ladder use their schools to develop rather than stunt their intellectual potential? How could public schools provide for the least advantaged what the most advantaged bought privately for their own children?

Positive Steps

America's cities have been evolving for decades to produce the conditions that now affect the lives of so many children. Paul Hill, in *Fixing Urban Schools,* suggests that multiple approaches are needed to bring about lasting change. Similarly, Michael Casserly, who directs the Council of the Great City Schools, articulates a "growing national consensus about what it will take to improve urban schools: set high standards,

HOW TO SPELL SUCCESS

By looking closely at high-poverty schools where children are successful, researchers are identifying the characteristics that can build educational resilience and support student success. Joseph F. Johnson, Jr., of the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas (www.starcenter.org), outlines seven factors that he finds consistently in high-poverty, high achievement schools, including those in urban areas:

- Focus on academic achievement. Goals are clear, measurable, rigorous, and challenging—for staff, as well as for students.
- No excuses. Staff members share a core assumption: Given the population we have, given the resources we have, we can find a way to make a powerful difference in the lives of children.
- Experimentation. Teachers are encouraged to ask: What will make a difference here? Local control over how to provide instruction is coupled with accountability for results.
- Inclusivity. Everyone who comes into contact with a child is part of the solution.
- Sense of family. People feel valued and respected.
- Collaboration. Teachers are given time and opportunities to learn from one another.
- Passion for improvement. The entire school community shares it.

RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS, PRINCIPALS

Two recent publications from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) offer help to school leaders and classroom teachers working with diverse learners, including those in urban schools.

- *Improving Education for Immigrant Students: A Guide for K-12 Educators in the Northwest and Alaska* (July 1998), developed by NWREL's Equity Center, opens with a historical look at immigration in the United States then shifts to the present to challenge myths about current population patterns and trends. The book offers a detailed look at the largest immigrant groups in the Northwest.

Educators will find a thorough discussion of adjustment issues that can affect immigrant children and their families. "Adjusting to a new culture is an involved process," the authors relate, "and the length of time in the United States has been shown to have an effect on school success." The book examines issues related to culture, language, generational and gender differences, and explores a variety of family and cultural supports that may help immigrants adjust to living in a new country.

Classroom strategies are offered for better serving the needs of immigrant students, as well as helping all students gain an understanding and appreciation of cultures other than their own. The book also includes extensive resources, including listings of community organizations located in the Northwest region.

- *Leading America's Schools: The Critical Role of the Principal* (April 1999) summarizes work developed by NWREL and the National Association for Schools of Excellence (NASE), an organization of nationally recognized school administrators whose accomplishments have dispelled the myth that poor and minority students cannot succeed.

The book draws on a decade of research to identify effective school practices and begins with a list of essential elements for achieving success. "All children can learn. Period," the authors assert. "It is our duty to make sure that new and practicing building administrators adhere to this credo." The book stresses the critical role of the principal, pointing out that the job "has changed from that of manager to leader."

Many urban districts struggle to recruit and retain school leaders. A detailed section of the booklet addresses how to identify, develop, and retain top-quality principals. Strategies are offered for developing leaders from within, as well as recruiting new staff leaders from other districts.

For information about ordering either publication, write to NWREL, Document Reproduction Service, 101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97204, or call (503) 275-9519.

> "What is it," we asked a huge gathering of urban school administrators, "about the presence of large numbers of poor, African American, or Latino city kids in your schools that makes those places ——?" we paused dramatically. "Wonderful?"
>
> —William Ayers and Patricia Ford, *City Kids, City Teachers: Reports from the Front Row*

strengthen teaching, improve discipline, instill accountability, involve the community, spend wisely, and do what works."

What are some of the ways urban schools are working to turn obstacles into opportunities for city kids? The answers are still in development, but here are four trends that promise to make a difference—in the Northwest and all across the country.

Recruiting strong leaders

The year before Patrick Durkin took over as principal at Goudy Elementary in a high-poverty neighborhood of Chicago, reporters had lambasted the school as "the worst in America." The scathing *Chicago Tribune* series began: "Welcome to Goudy, where the future dies early." The litany of woes ranged from street gangs to broken plumbing to classrooms where learning didn't happen.

Eleven years later, Durkin regularly escorts visitors through the halls of his yellow-brick schoolhouse to show off an urban school that works, and works well. Achievement is up. Enrollment is booming. Turnover is down. Durkin has changed staffing patterns so that there's a lower student-teacher ratio in the primary grades, when children are mastering reading skills. Reading specialists intervene early for children who are struggling. He has recruited teachers from local neighborhoods to work with children and families in the languages they speak at home and smooth the transition to learning in English. When they leave this school at eighth grade, many of Durkin's students routinely pass entrance exams to the most selective magnet high schools in Chicago.

It takes a strong leader to work such a transformation. Durkin, father of eight and a former captain for the Chicago Fire Department, is not one to back down in the face of challenges. The first day on the job at Goudy, he was waiting outside to greet his students when a fight erupted between rival gangs from neighboring housing projects. Durkin grabbed one of the gang leaders and had him arrested. Ever since, gangs have steered clear of this schoolyard. And Durkin has been free to devote his energies to building the atmosphere most likely to foster success for all students.

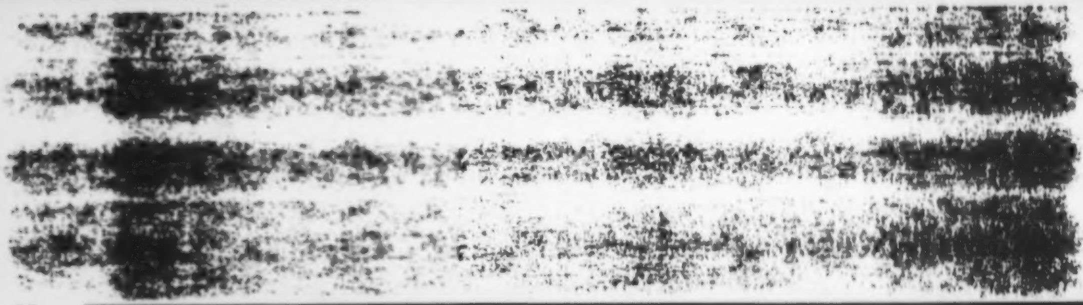
City schools where students thrive tend to rely on local decisionmaking rather than a centralized bureaucracy to get things done, according to urban researchers. That means principals, faculty, and local site councils have more responsibility and greater flexibility, and parents have ready access to school staff and a voice in how their children are being educated. The entire building shares in the responsibility for student success. Such a formula demands good leadership at the building level.

Effective school leaders also know how to tap local resources to meet children's needs. In urban areas, social services may be plentiful but fragmented. The school can be an important resource to pull together services to meet the needs of the "whole child."

A recent conference for principals from high-poverty schools in the Northwest stressed the importance of strong school leadership. Dr. Steve Nelson, who directs Planning and Program Development for the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL), told the gathering that the national push for school improvement will continue to call for "building-level, research-based practices that make a difference."

Nationwide, urban districts struggle to recruit qualified candidates for principal slots, according to the Council of the Great City Schools. A survey conducted last year found that 47 percent of urban districts reported a shortage of qualified candidates. Principals cite long hours, high stress, and better pay in the suburbs as reasons for staying away from city schools.

Some urban districts are developing new programs to fill the leadership gap. Chicago, for instance, provides a leadership institute for new principals. Toledo, Ohio, is one of several cities where the city school district and a university collaborate to train and mentor



URBAN NORTHWEST: BY THE NUMBERS

Who are the nation's city kids? They are the estimated 11 million students attending urban school districts, slightly more than a quarter of all public school students. More than a million are New Yorkers. About a third live in Florida, Texas, or California. And only a relative handful—about 275,000—live and learn in the largest cities of the Northwest region. In this corner of the country, only three districts—Anchorage, Portland, and Seattle—belong to the Council of the Great City Schools, which represents 58 of the nation's largest urban school districts.

Even those familiar with the geography of the Northwest might be surprised by what else the numbers reveal about urban education, Northwest-style.

Seattle, for instance, is clearly the largest city in the region, with a population of 516,000 in a greater metropolitan region of 2.2 million, according to Census figures. Last year the Seattle district enrolled an estimated 47,457 students, the highest number in 18 years but still fewer than Portland's 55,831 students or Anchorage's 48,309. In Portland (pop. 437,319) and Anchorage (pop. 226,338), urban students are more likely to attend public schools than their Seattle peers.

After these three largest districts, how do other Northwest urban areas compare in size? Here's the breakdown, based on 1998-99 enrollment estimates: Salem-Keizer, Oregon, 33,086; Spokane, Washington, 32,553; Tacoma, Washington, 31,939; Boise, Idaho, 26,913.

Although Northwest cities tend to be relatively smaller in scale than urban centers elsewhere in the country, they have been fast growing during recent years. From 1990 to 1995, the Northwest region grew by 11.4 percent, twice the national rate. Most of this growth has been concentrated in the cities. Boise, for instance, can't compare in size to the Los Angeles District, serving more than 680,000 students. But Idaho's largest city reported 26 percent growth from 1990 to 1996, according to Census figures. During the same period, the Portland area grew by 16 percent; Salem, 15 percent; Spokane, 12 percent; Tacoma, 12 percent; Anchorage, 11 percent; Seattle, 10 percent.

Nationally, urban students are more likely to be minorities than students in suburbs and rural areas. The nation's 100 largest districts, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), have a 66 percent minority enrollment, compared with 38 percent nationwide. Minority and racial composition, however, varies from city to city. Enrollment in Los Angeles is 89 percent non-White, with Hispanic students accounting for 68.5 percent of the total; Black, 13.8 percent; Asian/Pacific Islander, 6.5 percent; American Indian/Alaska Native, 0.3 percent. New York's city schools are 84 percent non-White, with the largest minority populations being Hispanic, at 37.5 percent, and Black, 35.8 percent.

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"When teachers care, believe in, and embrace the 'city kids,' they are not only enabling their healthy development and successful learning, but creating inside-out social change; they are building a creative and compassionate citizenry."

—Bonnie Benard,
Turning It Around for All Youth

aspiring principals. University of Washington President Richard L. McCormick, citing "the critical role of strong principals and superintendents in building good schools," recently announced plans for a training institute for K-12 leaders on the Seattle campus.

In the coming months, Nelson reports, NWREL hopes to be collaborating with researchers at Temple University and the LAB at Brown to build regional networks of peer support for school leaders.

Teaching well

Teaching city kids well takes attitude and aptitude. Teachers serving an inner-city population "must have the conviction that students of diverse backgrounds and educational histories have an actual chance to succeed," according to researchers from the Center for Education in the Inner Cities.

The Urban Network to Improve Teacher Education (UNITE), a collaboration of nine universities in the United States and Canada, reports that teachers themselves tend to see urban schools as challenging duty. In a recent UNITE survey, teachers said working a city school means dealing with cultural diversity, low socioeconomic status, high immigrant and refugee populations, high poverty, a variety of social problems, and a high student turnover rate. Teachers also expect to play multiple roles in urban classrooms, including social worker, nurturer, appeaser, and counselor, as well as academic teacher.

Successful urban teachers, according to UNITE research, possess or practice specific traits: empathy, respect for students, flexibility, self-care, patience, sense of humor, collegiality, high energy level. These traits have the double advantage of building on the strengths of city teachers and their students.

Martin Haberman, Professor of Education at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, has documented what he calls the "pedagogy of poverty" operating in many urban classrooms. This misguided set of teacher behaviors, which he criticizes in *City Kids, City Teachers*, involves such teacher-directed acts as dispensing information, giving directions, settling disputes, punishing noncompliance. Good urban teaching, he counters, involves another set of acts that fosters a student-centered learning environment. What does good urban teaching look like? Haberman suggests looking to students for answers. Good teaching is going on, he asserts, whenever students are:

- Involved with issues they regard as vital concerns
- Being helped to see major concepts, big ideas, and general principles, not merely the pursuit of isolated facts
- Involved in planning what they will be doing, actively involved in learning, directly involved in real-life experience, and actively involved in heterogeneous groups
- Involved in applying ideas such as fairness, equity, or justice to their world
- Asked to think about an idea in a way that questions common sense or widely accepted assumptions, that relates new ideas to ones learned previously, or applies an idea to the problems of living
- Involved in redoing, polishing, perfecting their work
- Involved in reflecting on their own lives and how they have come to believe and feel as they do

To build a stable source of capable teachers—especially those who have the skills and temperament to help city kids thrive—some communities are pursuing "grow your own" teacher programs. Portland Teachers Project, now a decade old, recruits and trains new urban teachers by drawing on the resources of the city's own neighborhoods. Teacher's aides who have worked in city schools, urban parents who have volunteered in their children's classrooms, and young adults who have grown up in the city are among the participants typically recruited for this scholarship and support program. A partnership of Portland Community College, Portland State University, and Portland Public Schools, the program aims to

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The Superintendent Who Listens

Ever since Ben Canada took the reins of Portland Public Schools, he's been working as if the community's future depends on him.

Turns out he's right.

Story by LEE SHERMAN

Photos by JUDY BLANKENSHIP

PORTLAND, Oregon—When job seeker Ben Canada was on the hot seat back in the spring of 1998, answering questions about his management style, one of his words seemed strangely out of place. What does "healing" have to do with running a school district? was the question that lodged in the mind of School Board Chairman Ron Saxton, one of seven board members conducting interviews to fill the vacancy at the top of Portland Public Schools. Healing brings to mind scalpels and blue scrubs. Self-help books. Revival tents. Talk shows. But teachers and textbooks? Not really.

"I *never* would have expected the word healing to come out at a job interview for superintendent," Saxton admits.

But that word arguably embodies the most important mission of Portland's top administrator today. And it's something that the 55-year-old Canada seems to have a natural bent for.

"The truth is," says Saxton, "Ben told me one time that if he had another career it would be as a minister."

Battered by a 10-year cash crunch, bruised by critics, and plagued by a persistent achievement gap between middle-class White kids and poor Black kids, the district was in danger of becoming another urban casualty. The pattern is all too familiar: When city schools start to falter, families flee for private or suburban alternatives. Scores plunge, resources wither, buildings decay. It's a death knell Portland doesn't want to hear.

Yet two prior superintendents, both widely viewed as "aloof," had failed to knit the district together. In Canada, who had led the Atlanta school system for four years, the board thought they saw a man with the right blend of warmth and doggedness to lead the ailing district back to health.

Canada's first year on the job is barely behind him, but already, a note of optimism is creeping into school discussions. Maybe, people are beginning to say, Portland *can* hold on to its claim as one of the nation's best urban school systems. When they hired Dr. Benjamin O. Canada, they hired, above all, a healer.

* * *

The South doesn't get much deeper than Tallulah, Louisiana, a little cotton-growing town just across the Big Muddy from Mississippi. That's where Canada grew up under the protective wing of his devout grandmother. And that's where he returned in 1967 with a college degree in his suitcase to take his first teaching job. But Tallulah, it seemed, hadn't moved much faster than that muddy old river in righting the injustices of a dual system. Excitedly comparing first paychecks with another new teacher—a White teacher—Canada felt his stomach lurch. Hers was $100 more than his. Indignant, he confronted the superintendent.

"That's what *all* the Negroes make," the man told him.

Even now when Canada tells that story, his voice falters, his eyes sadden. Thirty years of steady climbing from that small-town teaching post to his current status as a national leader in urban education haven't dulled those searing words.

In three decades, he has traveled as far in miles as he has in stature. The little boy who learned to sew a cuff, stitch a shoe, and milk a cow to help make ends meet in Tallulah grew up to be the man recently jetting to Africa with some of the world's top educators. He went to share ideas (and, with luck, meet with Nelson Mandela) on a study tour sponsored by the American Association of School Administrators, over which he presides. His growing reputation as a talented administrator has earned him a spot on the advisory panel of the prestigious Urban Superintendents Program of Harvard's Graduate School of Education. When Senator Howard Metzenbaum presented him with a national award in 1994, these were the congressman's words: "Dr. Canada is one who stayed true to his principles. Dr. Canada is one who would not shirk his responsibility as an educator to protect every student's rights. Dr. Canada is one man who would not cave in."

On that eye-opening payday in Tallulah, Canada didn't cave in to bigotry. He quit his job. In the American tradition, he lit out for the West.

"Best decision I ever made," he says.

But from Tallulah he took away more than just painful memories. He learned about hard work and sacrifice every afternoon when he hoed the family vegetable garden or herded the two family cows to pas-

ture. His friends would wave and call out, "Hey, Farmer Ben!" as they trotted off to the baseball field without him. He learned about self-sufficiency from a poor but proud grandmother who passed on to him her skills as a baker, a cook, a carpenter, a gardener, a cobbler, and a seamstress ("I can sew anything, from putting in cuffs to zippers and buttons," he notes with pride). He learned about faith when he sang hymns every Sunday in the African American Episcopal church he attended at his grandmother's side. And he learned about reaching high from the teachers who challenged and inspired him. There was Mildred Crockett, who taught her vocal students to sing *all* kinds of music at a time when African Americans were expected to stick to Gospel. And Otis Nichols, the biology teacher who wouldn't let up. "I always wanted to be like Mr. Nichols," Canada says. "He could challenge you, really press you—he would almost irritate you with his pressing—but you would feel so good when you'd achieved it."

Community expectations for the segregated schools he attended were low. In the Tallulah of his youth, "education" was for White folks. Black kids got "training." But inside the walls of Madison Parish Training School and Ruben McCall High School, the staff was unswerv-

Once a month, Superintendent Ben Canada devotes a day to teaching. At Stephenson Elementary (below) in October, he cheers on third-graders learning to use library call numbers, coaches a child on keyboarding skills, and listens to a girl read aloud.

Top: "When I'm talking to a child, I'm really trying to give that child my full attention," says Canada.

Bottom: A student writes about the visit of "Dr. Canada" in her journal.

ing on excellence.

"We had people who really pushed you and demanded that you achieve at a certain level," Canada recalls. "Mediocrity was not accepted. You were pushed higher than you thought you could go."

A Tarnished Star

Portland Public Schools bills itself as "the urban district that works." The big question hanging over the district these days is, Can it hold on to that distinction? Can Ben Canada and his team put the 55,000-student district back on track for the new century?

The district's longstanding status as a star of city education is more than a little tarnished these days. A decade-long funding crisis forced the Northwest's largest district to switch from a paring knife to a machete as it hacked away at programs and services year after year. The "fat" and "frills" some taxpayers complain about were carved off long ago. These days, the district is reduced to "lopping off limbs," in the words of one administrator.

After voters passed Measure 5 in 1990—the ballot measure that shrunk Portland schools' main funding source by limiting property tax rates—the district first whittled away at the central office. Dozens of midlevel administrators got pink slips. By 1996, the cuts reached the classroom. So far, 450 teaching slots have been axed.

Today, most Portland schools are running bare-bones programs bereft of art, music, and drama, with deep cutbacks in PE and world languages. Classes are big. Choices are few. Science textbooks are 10 years out of date—a fact that Saxton calls "criminal."

But this is where Portland's story veers away from the history of other cities. Unwilling to watch their top-notch schools—long a big point of pride for Portlanders—go the way of St. Louis or Detroit, the community has stepped up.

The city council has kicked in funds ($40 million over six years) to keep the Portland Public Schools and four smaller urban districts floating. Parents are ponying up thousands of dollars in donations to keep class sizes from bloating. Some affluent families donate as much as $200 a month to 25 individual school foundations so that schools like top-performing Lincoln High can buy art history textbooks to replace blurry photocopies of Michelangelo's "David" and Picasso's "Guernica." The donations are shared with other schools, as well. Three years ago, concerned parents and community members created the Portland Public Schools Foundation, which so far has raised $6 million for the district.

This wellspring of energy and money on behalf of schools is tied to the Northwest's ferocious commitment to livability, many observers say. The same maverick spirit that spawned Oregon's famed beach and bottle bills—progressive laws aimed at saving the state's unspoiled landscape—may be what separates Portlanders from residents of other big cities. People here don't just watch things crumble around them. They act.

"We have an incredible base of parental and community support that's missing in a lot of places," says Board Chair Saxton, an attorney and father of a son attending Lincoln. "I think we see a community saying, 'We refuse to accept the loss of our schools. We're not going to accept failure.'"

In Portland, Canada sees a rare "sense of pride in the urban core," hand-in-hand with a get-involved ethic. "In the Pacific Northwest, people want to be engaged in the decisionmaking process," he says. "They're not going to just sit back and let a superintendent or a board dictate what is going to happen."

Dictating, however, is just what the district tried to do in pre-Canada days, critics charge. Cynthia Guyer, whose activism as a concerned parent led to her current position as Executive Director of the Portland Public Schools Foundation, describes a district that was insular, top-down, and rigid.

"A lot of people have felt like the doors have not been opened to their aspirations for a better education for kids," she says from her eastside office overlooking downtown. Even district employees, she says, describe a culture that was "very resistant to being entrepreneurial, to building partnerships, to believing in change."

Sue Hagmeier, one of the longestserving members of the school board, has been on both sides of the fence: insider and critic. She got involved years ago as a mom who was unhappy with her gifted daughter's schooling. "There just was not a customer-service ethic in the district at that time," she recalls.

Now, she says, "I think we're much more open to the community and to parents. I think we're a lot more willing to adjust programs to kids instead of (just saying), 'Eat it and shut up'—which the district was kind of famous for at one time."

'Let's Do This Together'

Canada is flinging the doors open wide, and with Southern-style hospitality saying, Come on down. This is your district. Let's do this together. Not only does Canada invite everybody to the table, he opens the linen closet for inspection.

"His approach is to never hide things from the public," says Saxton. "It's always, How do we make sure people know this? How do we get this information out, even if it's bad? To him, it would be far worse to be accused of hiding something than to accept responsibility for whatever mistake occurred."

Soon after taking his new job, Canada stumbled onto the district's antiquated internal mail system. He wanted to send an all-staff memo. "Oh," he was told, "that'll take two days. We deliver to half the sites on one day, the rest on the next." Canada was aghast.

When something important happened in the district, employees were getting the details on the 10 o'clock news or in the morning paper. "Some other organization is telling our people *their* version of what we're doing," he notes. "I said, 'That doesn't make any sense, folks.'"

Canada quickly hired an executive communications director and a couple of support staff to revive the flagging public information office, which had shriveled from eight employees to one. A $200,000 contribution of cash and donated services from Portland General Electric is helping to pay for the newly fattened office, which has launched internal and external newsletters to ensure a regular flow of district news.

The teachers' union is critical of the hire. In the view of Richard Garrett, President of the Portland Association of Teachers, the new communications director is just one more high-paid administrator in an overstuffed central office.

"We certainly recognize that the district has a great need to manage broad and complex issues," says Garrett. "But money spent on administrators doesn't go to buy textbooks."

Canada staunchly defends the hire.

"If people don't know what you're doing—including your own people—you can't expect to have support from the outside," he says. "You leave yourself wide open for speculation. You're always chasing rumors rather than getting out the information that you want people to respond to."

Canada's pledge to share complete and accurate information is beginning to restore the public's trust in the district, observers say. In the old days, critics complained about the central office issuing squishy numbers that were "always changing," Saxton reports. Garrett describes the superintendent's office under Canada's predecessor Jack Bierwirth as "herky-jerky"—jumping from one position to another.

"The school district had lost its credibility with a variety of audiences—with the legislature that controls our funding; with the city and county we need as partners; with the business community that had really turned its back to a large degree because it didn't believe the district's numbers," says Saxton, who's also on the board of the Portland Chamber of Commerce. "The relationship with the business community is just 100 percent better."

Canada's hiring of several other key administrators—"talented folks in terms of financial credibility with business and the legislature"—is adding to the impression of renewed district competence, says Duncan Wyse of the Oregon Business Council. But it's Canada's unique blend of heartwarming personality and hardheaded management that has perhaps given the biggest boost to the district's image.

"The credibility of the district is largely tied to the personal credibility of the superintendent," Saxton asserts. "I think Ben has done a great job with that. People believe he's sincere and honest and has personal values they like. But he has a pretty tough side to him when it comes to expecting performance from staff. We talked about, 'What do you do with sloppy numbers?' He said, 'You don't accept them, that's what you do.'"

People who work with him describe him as open but shrewd, friendly but exacting, warm but firm. "He's a taskmaster," one staff member confides. Still, he's hardest on himself. If his staff puts in 60 hours a week to get the job done, he puts in 80.

"The truth is, he's trying to do about twice as much as any human being can do," says Saxton. "I get e-mails from him at one in the morning. I've told him, 'I'm going to fire you if you don't stop sending e-mails at one in the morning. Go to bed!' He's just passionate about his job."

Top: "You're a great reader!" Canada tells a student.

Bottom: Even a game of two-square is a teachable moment for Canada.

Tycoons and Welfare Moms

Fanning south from the gritty industrial strip along the Columbia River to the leafy suburb of Lake Oswego, Portland Public Schools enrolls students from the extremes of wealth and poverty. Rich kids and poor kids ride bikes and play ball in neighborhoods that bump right up against each other—the children of lawyers and tycoons living in gracious old neighborhoods like Irvington, Alameda, and Eastmoreland. The children of laborers and welfare moms, sometimes just blocks away, growing up in the humbler neighborhoods of Albina and Sabin and Lent. Inner-city families in peeling rentals and subsidized apartments can see million-dollar mansions hanging on the wooded slopes of the West Hills just across the river. It's not a town where country-clubbers live in gated enclaves far removed from crumbling slums, but a town with mostly middle-class homes sprinkled with pockets of exclusivity and struggle. In Portland, kids from both ends of affluence go to schools within a few minutes' drive from each other. Often, in fact, they sit side by side in the classroom.

Ben Canada moves between the two worlds with an easy grace. The duality sometimes shows in his clothes. He'll wear a dark-blue suit and a crisp white shirt, conservative, quiet. But around his neck hangs a flamboyant, Save the Children tie splashed with kids' drawings in reds and yellows, rockin' and shoutin'.

More important, his comfort with all kinds of groups in all kinds of settings shows up in his day-to-day dealings in the district. For a quick snapshot, take the morning of October 14. Even before the sun rises over Mt. Hood, Canada is standing in the library of Harriet Tubman Middle School talking with two dozen student leaders about urgent issues on the district's agenda. On a mural above him, the image of the school's namesake keeps vigil over her legacy as a freer of slaves. Here, his audience is teens of all colors in sweatshirts and jeans. Breakfast is bagels and juice. Background music is rush-hour traffic on I-5.

By 8 o'clock, Canada is standing under a crystal chandelier in Meier & Frank's elegant Georgian Room downtown, chatting with the chairman of Oregon's venerable department store chain. After delivering a heartfelt speech about the importance of volunteers to the vitality of schools, he gives hugs and kisses to six senior citizen "Role Models" being honored by the city's prestigious OASIS program. This time, his audience is middle-aged community pillars in suits, and silver-haired ladies in black velvet hats. Breakfast is croissants and fresh fruit. Background music is live piano tunes by Gershwin and Kern. If it troubles him that his is the only African American face in the crowd, it doesn't show. Relaxed and smiling, he looks right at home.

The deep smile lines around his eyes and the extra pounds around his waist suggest a man who attacks life with pleasure. Unlike Canada's predecessor, who seemed uncomfortable in the limelight and was rarely spotted in public, Canada relishes the attention. Only a year and a half into his tenure, his face is as familiar in Portland as the twin towers of the Oregon Convention Center or the arching span of the Fremont Bridge. Portlanders who watched the six o'clock news on the first day of school saw the smiling superintendent at a bus stop, talking to kids and waiting to board. Hundreds of students have come home with news that Canada was their sub for the day, or dropped by their classroom to visit. "He gave me his business card, and told me to e-mail him!" one sixth-grader said proudly. His first year in Portland, Canada's smile was seen in nearly all of the district's 100 schools and at more than 700 meetings.

The demand for his presence grows. Everyone in town wants him on the roster. He hates to turn down speaking invitations. His solution when he can't make it in person?

Make it on videotape.

The day before his Africa trip, he's trying to wedge one last taping session into his frantic schedule. In the basement of Jefferson High School, the district's TV crew fiddles with the teleprompter while the PR team pencils in last-minute edits to two scripts—one for the Oregon School Public Relations Association's annual conference and another for a district-sponsored leadership institute for principals, events he will miss while overseas.

When the superintendent finally strides through the door, unfazed by his 30-minute tardiness, he slides comfortably into an armchair surrounded by klieg lights. Looking calmly at the camera, he launches into the hastily written script without even a dry run. "Hello, everyone. I'm excited to join you in today's conference on nurturing and developing leadership . . . ."

Bookless in Seattle

High expectations for all is a mantra in education circles these days. For Canada, it's a sacred calling. It took root in Tallulah and deepened when—with his first-grade sweetheart Doris as his bride—he settled in Seattle near his brother's Navy base. At Hawthorne Elementary, a troubled school on Seattle's struggling south end, Canada saw powerful evidence that even the most at-risk kids at the most at-risk school could attain lofty goals. Soon after taking the principal's job, he discovered what a very steep climb it would be. Stashed in the school library were boxes and boxes of never-opened books.

"Why aren't these books on the shelves?" he asked the elderly librarian.

"Oh," she said, "because the children will get them dirty."

The librarian may have been stingy with books. But just down the hall, there was a teacher who was sharing books with zeal. Carol Postell's attitude impressed and inspired Canada. "She was the ideal professional who truly says, 'High expectations make the difference,'" he says. "Carol would say to every second-grader when they walked in the door, 'You're a *great* reader,' or 'You're going to be a great reader when you leave.'" And they were.

During Canada's tenure there, from 1973 to 1975, reading scores rose dramatically. The school reaped high honors for what it had accomplished. But Canada doesn't claim all the credit. "It was because of the staff," he says. "If you really work with your staff as a team, it'll make a difference—rather than coming in with 'I said . . .' and 'You'd better . . . .' A great principal is a person who learns to lead in collaboration."

Just as Canada did in Seattle, Portland Public Schools spotlighted reading as its Number One priority even before the new superintendent arrived. The board is betting that keeping a laserlike focus on reading, especially in the early years, will dislodge the rock-bottom scores that have plagued certain schools serving poor, minority students. Some stubborn scores have already bobbed upward. "The entire city ought to cheer the impressive gains at Marysville Elementary," wrote *The Oregonian* in a July editorial, "where 88 percent of third-graders reached the state reading benchmark this year, compared with only 49 percent a year ago."

Marysville and other newly successful schools are winning because they're zeroing in on literacy, Canada says.

"You can walk in any classroom, any time of the day, and there's a clear focus on reading," he says. "*Everybody* is focused on reading. They're constantly saying, 'You must read, you must read better, you're going to read.' They're celebrating reading, reading, reading."

But not everyone is celebrating. The same *Oregonian* editorial bemoans the "disturbingly low" scores at schools like Humboldt Elementary and Jefferson High, which have been radically overhauled in recent years, with disappointing results. "There remains an uncomfortably strong correlation between the socioeconomic status of Portland schools and their test results," the newspaper charges. "While schools situated in some affluent areas report that 90 percent of their students reached the state benchmarks (last year), schools in the city's poorest neighborhoods struggled to put 20 percent of their students above the benchmarks."

This glaring gap has caused intense friction between the district and the African American community over the years. Canada is painfully aware of the heat it has generated. Canada's very first budget, in fact, pumped extra dollars into 25 chronically low-performing schools.

"We're actively working to turn it around," he says. "Those groups have had concerns with the district, and I'll say that they are right. As a system, we weren't listening well. Or let's turn it around and say we were listening, but we weren't hearing."

For decades, Ron Herndon has been the most visible and vocal local leader lambasting the district for its achievement gap. Despite promises of better scores from Canada and the school board, the longtime Director of Albina Head Start sees little to cheer about.

"I've heard 20-plus years of excuses for why they haven't educated low-income children," he says.

Herndon charges that top district jobs should go only to people with a

SEARCHING FOR A NORTH STAR

In 1996, 30,000 Oregonians took to the streets in support of their beleaguered schools. In the state's largest public demonstration ever, parents, teachers, kids, and other school backers marched through Portland carrying a powerful message to those in charge of parceling out public dollars. That message: The education of children is our top priority. Don't shortchange our kids.

The group that organized the march, the Portland Public Schools Foundation, is now spearheading a less public, but potentially more powerful, process for change. Recognizing that even with plenty of money a district will stumble without a clear direction, the foundation began asking Portland Public Schools to come up with a plan — a "North Star" — to guide it, says foundation Director Cynthia Guyer.

"We began to see that although there are many things to be proud of in Portland, there are deep, systemic challenges facing individual schools, and indeed the whole school system," Guyer says. "We started asking for a more coherent, comprehensive road map from the district leadership so that we could target our resources and our time and energy most effectively."

The spur to action was an audit of the district's performance funded by the city.

"Everyone was shocked by the audit because they thought it was going to be on maintenance and janitors and business functions," says Guyer. "But what auditor KPMG Peat Marwick said is, those aren't your biggest issues. Your biggest issue is that people are flailing around with no sense of where you're going, how you're going to get there, what are the best practices — what's your theory of change."

Meanwhile, new leaders had taken the helm of the troubled district. Superintendent Ben Canada and School Board Chairman Ron Saxton were hungry for change.

"At that point," Guyer says, "I think Ben and Ron decided that doing such an initiative alone as a district — the cabinet or the school board going on a retreat with the superintendent — was not going to meet the challenge even if they came up with something brilliant. So they said, 'We'll do it with the Portland Public Schools Foundation as a partnership.'"

After hiring Steve Barone of Transformation Systems to facilitate the strategic planning process and holding a series of public "speak out sessions," the foundation invited people from every segment of Portland society to create a first draft. Along with teachers, parents, students, and administrators, there were government officials and ministers, business executives and union leaders, community activists and school support staff. The 32-member core team met for three grueling, sometimes gut-wrenching 10-hour days.

"The worst critics of the district were invited to that room," Guyer reports. "There were some ultimate meltdowns: Republican businessmen, knee-jerk on diversity, knee-jerk on affirmative action, knee-jerk on welfare, knee-jerk on the public sector being mediocre. And then you have the perspective of someone who works in the minority community who sees lots of schools fail and lots of children hurt by that failure and who has a lot of anger. You get a lot of really honest discussion about why people are leaving Portland schools, what's wrong with the culture."

The draft plan, which lays out the district's mission, core values, objectives, and strategies, is now undergoing community scrutiny and refinement. At its heart is an uncompromising commitment to excellence. The plan calls for no less than 100 percent of Portland students to meet or exceed rigorous academic standards by 2005.

Guyer expresses guarded optimism about the district's chances for renewal. "Slowly," she says, "concentric circles of some of the toughest critics in the minority community, in business, within our ranks of principals, some teachers, the teachers' union, are coming to the table and feeling like there's a glimmer of hope and energy being unleashed. I'm not Pollyanna. I don't think we'll wake up next September and it'll all be done, and be a new day. But I think we are building trust and a new way of working. And people are feeling heard." ■

Cynthia Guyer [illegible] [illegible] "People are feeling heard" [illegible] Photo by [illegible] proven record of success in the classroom. And he dislikes the district's new language arts program, which allows schools to choose from among three literacy packages.

"A school should not have the autonomy to choose a curriculum if they have failed for the last 100 years," he asserts. "If I'm an engineer and my last three bridges fall down, am I going to be given the option on how to mix the cement? No. But if kids fall down, it's their fault and it's their family's fault."

Herndon believes the district should unify its curriculum so that kids who move a lot—as they typically do in poor neighborhoods—can stay on the same page from school to school.

The trouble with that idea, school board members say, is that for every school where few children are achieving at even basic levels, you have other schools where most kids are succeeding. In a district like Portland, which has poor and middle-class neighborhoods "all mixed up," as Saxton observes, a one-size-fits-all curriculum isn't the answer.

Says Hagmeier: "A school where you're doing a lot of catching up is different from a school where most kids are coming to first grade already reading. We have both of those in the district. The same off-the-shelf program isn't going to be appropriate both places."

A Changing Landscape

As you travel west on Broadway from the Hollywood district, where Fernwood Middle School chalks up some of the district's highest scores, the landscape changes with a startling abruptness. At a snarled intersection where streets and freeways collide in a tangle of traffic and concrete, Broadway dips steeply toward the river. The avenue's bistros and boutiques suddenly give way to a gray phalanx of warehouses, body shops, and wholesale suppliers. A grain elevator hulks on the waterfront.

Just past the freeway onramp, where trucks rumble down I-5 day and night, Harriet Tubman, one of Portland's most troubled middle schools, shares a block with Industrial Welding Supply. At 6:30 on Thursday mornings, workers driving to early shifts might see a dusty black Ford Explorer pull up to the school's library, its corrugated metal siding blending with neighboring buildings. Ben Canada's workday has begun. It won't end till he drops into bed after answering every one of his 100-plus e-mails well after midnight.

On this still-dark October morning, Canada is speaking with one of the district's most important constituencies: students. Kids from middle schools and high schools all over the district yawn over cold Danish at the weekly meeting of the Super SAC—the superintendent's student advisory council. There are clean-cut boys in baseball caps next to guys with ponytails and goatees. Girls in raggedy jackets sit beside girls with carefully applied makeup. This diverse group is linked by a shared interest: being heard.

As the sun begins to tint the sky outside, the superintendent and students engage in a spirited give and take on issues facing the district. The conversation veers away from the official topics—Boy Scout recruiting and Nike's upcoming youth forum—to pro-life demonstrations at one high school, an after-school rumble at another, and a panic at a neighboring district. They've touched on the KKK, Columbine, and Channel One by the time they break into committees to tackle student government, scheduling, fees, teacher evaluation, teacher recognition, and statewide standards testing.

"I like the idea of students having a voice and the superintendent's ear," says Kalin Schmoldt, a Cleveland High senior on the council.

Says Franklin High senior Adrienne Armstrong: "I want youth to have a voice in decisions that are being made about them. I think Dr. Canada is a great guy. He's being very strong in what he believes and he's not giving up."

Adrienne shares with Canada a passion for the arts. This young activist is doing her part by leading a petition drive to return the arts to her high school. For his part, the big man who sings baritone in his church choir told school board members he wouldn't take the Portland job unless they work with him to restore every child's chance to blow a horn, bang a drum, belt out a song, dabble in paint, mold in clay, play a role onstage or backstage.

In characteristic collaborative fashion, Canada is tapping into the strengths of the city at large. He and a team of teachers are working "to bring all the arts organizations in the community to one table to talk about how do we blend resources, blend ideas, and give support to getting the arts back into the classroom."

He reminisces about Portland's glory days, which he watched from afar. "Portland at one time had some of the finest arts components you could find anywhere in the country. Portland was viewed as a really neat place. You'd look at Portland to see what was working in urban education. They were always on the cutting edge of innovation—great thinkers, great staff."

Portland schools have lost some of their old luster. But, he says, "We'll take it back."

The healing has begun. ■

THE EDUCAT

WHAT CAN A POOR SCHOOL DO WITH AN EXTRA $1 MILLION A YEAR? A SEATTLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AGREES TO FIND OUT.

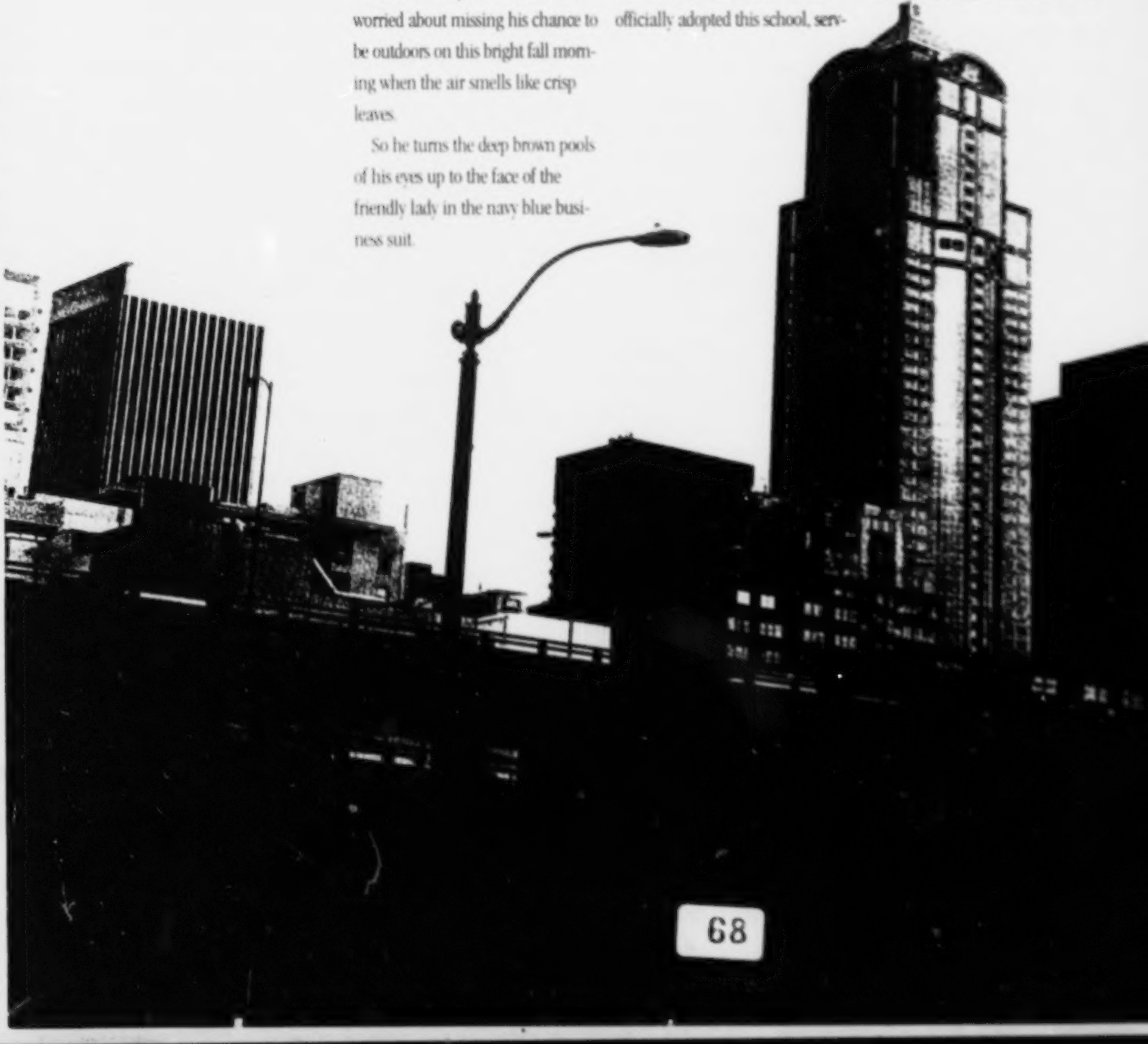
SEATTLE, Washington— As classroom emergencies go, this one's pretty minor. A five-year-old boy can't find his jacket. And he's upset. His classmates are outside climbing on the new play structure, but his teacher won't let him go out in shirtsleeves. His mom just bought the jacket, brand new at K-Mart, and she's not going to be happy if he lost it already. Most of all, he's worried about missing his chance to be outdoors on this bright fall morning when the air smells like crisp leaves.

So he turns the deep brown pools of his eyes up to the face of the friendly lady in the navy blue business suit.

"Can we please hurry?" he asks, barely louder than a whisper.

Holly Miller answers by putting out her hand. The boy takes hold, and they set off down the hall at a fast clip.

At any other school, this would be an ordinary moment. But ordinary time stopped last year at T.T. Minor Elementary. That's when Seattle millionaire Stuart Sloan officially adopted this school, serving a high-poverty, predominately African American population in an aging brick building in Seattle's Central District. Sloan's commitment is to cover program needs, including an extended school year, an extended school day, small, well-staffed classes, extra meals, uniforms, ongoing staff training in curriculum, and family assistance, including support for mental and



ON OF AN ANGEL

Story and photos by SUZIE BOSS

physical health. Estimated cost? At least $1 million per year.

Sloan, the 55-year-old former chairman of Quality Food Centers, has been engaged in other high-profile Seattle businesses, ranging from real estate to software. And business sense is part of what has motivated his philanthropy. "The way to ensure we're growing as a society is to be competitive," he told the *Seattle Times* earlier this year. "You just have to be educated" to have a competitive edge as an adult. But his heart also factors into the equation. As he told the *Times*, "I was really looking to do something I felt could truly make a difference. You have to start young. That's how we got to four-year-olds."

Holly Miller was the director of the Seattle Parks Department when Sloan handpicked her to manage the unique public-private partnership at T.T. Minor. And Miller's attitude lets children know that nothing is more important than connecting them with what they need. Whether it's family counseling, a well-designed curriculum, or help finding a lost jacket, each thread strengthens the fabric of school and community.

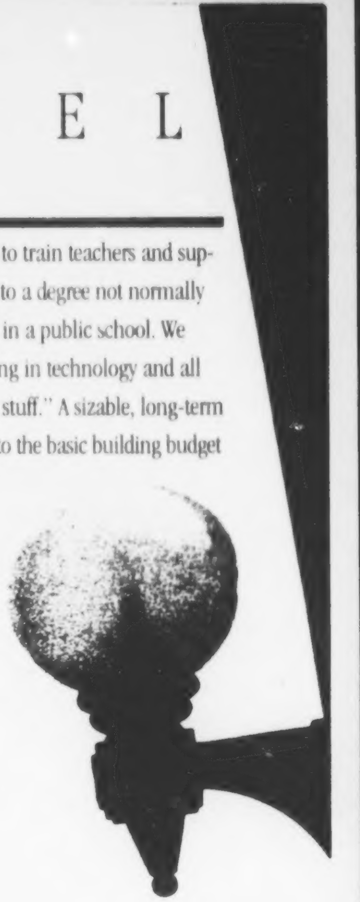
In the long term, the program has the potential to reach far beyond the school walls, predicts University of Washington researcher Michelle Bell, "to produce productive citizens who are whole, strong, healthy people."

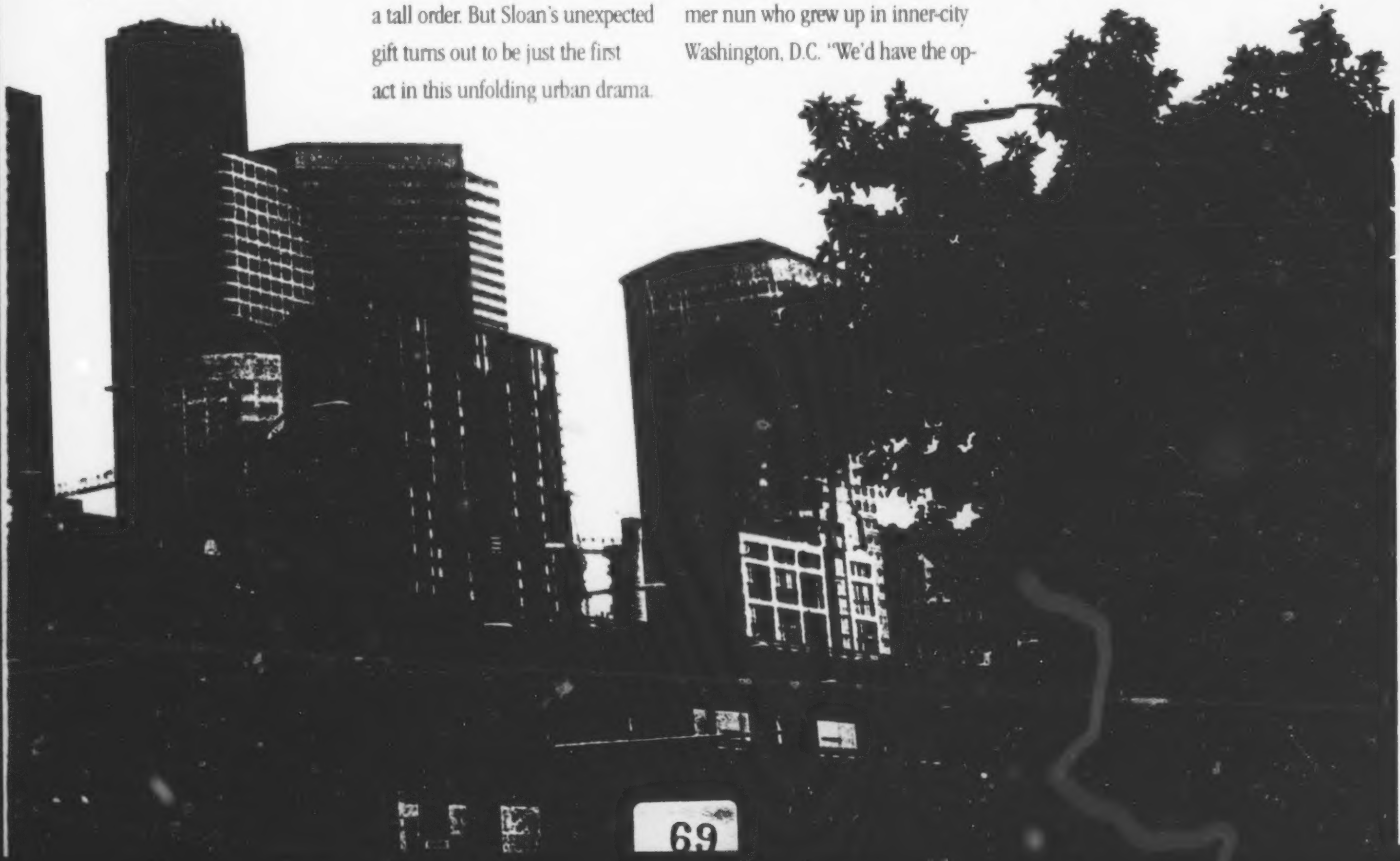
Even with an angel's help, that's a tall order. But Sloan's unexpected gift turns out to be just the first act in this unfolding urban drama. What happens next depends on the whole community.

TURNING LIGHTS ON

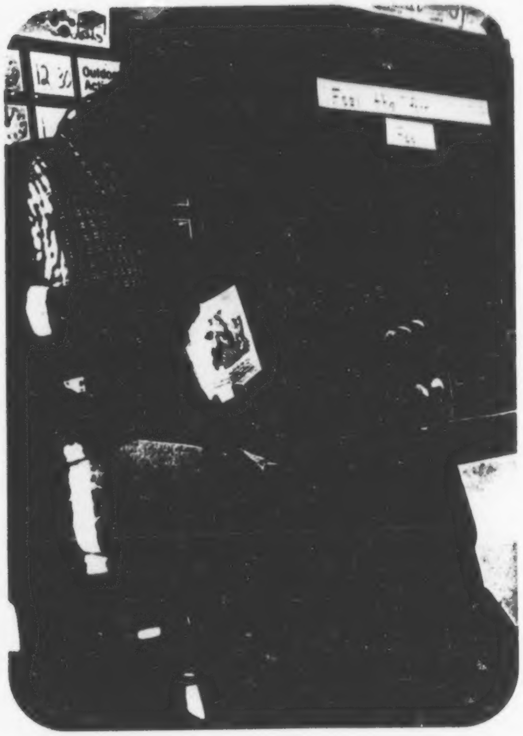
For 32 of her 54 years, Sherrill Adams has been an educator. She's been teacher and principal, in private and public schools, in cities and in suburbs. And for years, she's been bothered by a recurring pattern. "Kids come in with their lights on. At kindergarten or first grade, they're inquisitive, eager, energetic. Then we turn the switch off," she says, "especially in urban settings, and especially for children of color."

When Adams heard about the opportunity to reinvent an urban public school, her own lights went on. "This was a dream come true," says the African American woman, a former nun who grew up in inner-city Washington, D.C. "We'd have the opportunity to train teachers and support staff to a degree not normally available in a public school. We could bring in technology and all the latest stuff." A sizable, long-term addition to the basic building budget





Child-centered learning is at the heart of the school's expanded offerings.



could mean everything from smaller classes to more field trips to increased outreach to parents. Adams' mind raced with the possibilities.

But she didn't forget what experience had already taught her. "I didn't think for a minute," she says, "that this would be easy."

Long-term residents of Seattle's Central District, a densely populated, historic neighborhood located due east of the downtown skyscrapers, have seen plenty of other programs and patrons come and go over the years. "People of color are familiar with outsiders who come in and say they know what you need," acknowledges Adams. "And when programs don't work, the community gets blamed. Society has given us reason to be suspicious. So when we see someone like Stuart Sloan, a White man with money, the community has a right to ask why we should trust him."

That question was voiced, loud and clear, at a series of community forums held soon after the Seattle school district agreed to accept Sloan's gift. In fact, it took some lobbying by Sloan to convince the district that his offer made sense. Previous administrations had turned him down, but when John Stanford took over as superintendent in 1995, Sloan found a leader willing to think in new ways about public education. Stanford was eager to infuse the urban district with new ideas that would benefit children. His concept of reform started at the building level, just as Sloan was proposing. Not surprisingly, then, Stanford embraced the goal of turning a low-achieving, inner-city elementary school into a model of innovation. The superintendent died last year, before T.T. Minor's metamorphosis was complete. But it was fitting that a choir from the school sang at his memorial service.

Gradually, parents have warmed up to the unique partnership, too. As community members have been assured that they would have a strong say in the changes at their neighborhood school—a school many of them also attended as children—initial suspicion has given way to enthusiasm. "Parents needed to be sure this wasn't just an experiment," says Bell, an Associate Professor in the UW's Department of Health Services who has been hired by Sloan to evaluate the program. "They wanted to be sure their kids would benefit."

Now in her second school year at T.T. Minor, Adams has survived parent anxieties, staff turnover, external criticism, and the disruption that comes "when you're trying to create change with human beings." These are familiar challenges for any school that attempts major reforms. But because of Sloan's gift and the attention that has come with it, every hiccup at T.T. Minor now happens under a spotlight. "Society wants instant results," Adams says, sighing as she settles into a rocking chair in the school's new family center. "And impatience causes people to be critical."

Instead of trying for an overnight miracle, T.T. Minor is growing into its new shape gradually. Some new program offerings—such as the before-and after-school program that's not only free, but integrated into the rest of the school day—are available to all children in the building, from kindergarten through fifth grade. But specific classroom enhancements, such as smaller-sized classes, child-centered curricula, and onsite teacher training, are being phased in. During the 1998-99 school year, 80 children in prekindergarten and kindergarten were part of the new Enhanced Program. This year, the program has grown to include first grade, serving a total of 120 students. Next year, second-graders will come into the program. By 2003, the whole school will be participating.

Principal Adams is responsible for the education of all 260 students, of course, not just those enrolled in the new program. And that's led to some inevitable tension. Some parents, for instance, complained last year of "hamburger versus steak" treatment for children in different grades. Some veteran teachers balked at the longer school-year calendar at T.T. Minor, or didn't want to learn new teaching practices. Last year, Adams had to fill 26 staff vacancies, many with teachers brand new to the profession and the neighborhood. A new schoolwide approach to discipline has also meant some confusion while students learn "peacemaking" skills to settle their own disputes. New students are introduced to these conflict-resolution skills from their first day in school. But older students, accustomed to a more traditional approach to discipline, have had to adjust to the new school climate. "The challenge now is to make it seamless," Adams explains, "so there is no division."

Despite the day-to-day challenges, Adams is keeping an eye on the dream that drew her to the Central District last year. "If we're given time to get it done," she predicts, "not only will our kids eventually blow the achievement tests out of the water, but they will be leaders. This will be a fundamental, monumental change that will seep into the community."

COMPLETING THE CIRCLE

Before she joined the reorganized T.T. Minor staff as the school's Health Care Coordinator, Elizabeth "Liz" Thomas had already devoted a long career to improving the health care of inner-city children at Odessa Brown Children's Clinic in the Central District. Now, she draws on her 24 years of experience as a nurse practitioner to find ways to help children who are put at risk by poverty or family distress.

A child's behavior at school, Thomas knows, can be a symptom of other concerns. So when a teacher calls her to help with a student who is disruptive in class or whose behavior is impacting his ability to learn, Thomas starts by gathering more information. She uses a "holistic approach," she says, finding out about the child's family and medical history until she has all the information necessary to understand why the child is being disruptive. Thomas often pays a visit to the child's home as part of her assessment of the child's needs. She asks about prenatal care, birth history, and ongoing primary care. She considers all the information necessary before "labeling" a child.

Next, she looks for solutions. Thomas provides case management, bringing all the support pieces together "to enhance the child's development." Some children, she says, get bounced from one foster home to another if their family is in turmoil. They need stability. Some may need psychiatric evaluation, but lack insurance to cover mental health care. Many are living with grandparents "who are doing a beautiful job," Thomas says, "but they're tired. They need support, too."

A petite woman with a blazing smile, Thomas admits that it can be discouraging to see the "toll" poverty takes on family life. "I see families needing counseling, housing, jobs, and food. Many children suffer from emotional and social deprivation. We can provide some help to children at school, but they also need support in place when they go home." It's a circle, she explains. "What happens at home affects the child's well-being, socially, emotionally, and cognitively." The outreach that Thomas coordinates is needed to carry out the holistic approach—to keep that circle unbroken.

Aggressive outreach is an invaluable benefit that Sloan's support is providing, says Pauline Hill, who oversees elementary education for the Seattle district. "Our nursing staff throughout the district is minimal, at best," Hill says. "This outreach connects families with services they might not ordinarily receive." And because T.T. Minor now enrolls pre-K students, she points out, "children are getting the services they need even earlier in life."

Throughout the Central District, signs of revival are becoming more visible, with new housing going up, older homes being refurbished, and

T.T. Minor students are given ample opportunities to share their strengths and develop their skills.

even a new Starbucks open for business. But poverty remains widespread. Census reports from 1990 showed nearly a quarter of the neighborhood's 10,000 households living below the poverty level. At T.T. Minor, more than 75 percent of children qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. The Central Area Development Association is bringing economic investment back into the once-blighted neighborhood, but long-time residents like Thomas worry about poor families feeling squeezed out by gentrification. "Who can afford these new homes?" she asks. What keeps Thomas optimistic, she says, "is when I see children start to succeed and not placed in special ed. That helps me. And when support filters into children's homes, that has a rippling effect on the whole community."

Looking around at the Central District, Thomas sees beyond the struggles many families face. She sees their strengths and shares their pride. When she teaches parenting classes, for instance, Thomas starts by having parents look inward, to take stock of their own attributes. She asks: "How do you parents promote your own well-being? What makes you happy? What's good in your lives?" Mothers who are young might realize that their youthful energy is a positive quality, for example. Those who are good at keeping their tempers in check when frustrations pile up might discover they have the strength of self-control. Similarly, Thomas asks parents to identify their children's strengths. "It's so easy to focus only on the negatives," she says. "When I ask them what their child does well, their eyes light up."

Teachers need to be aware of these strengths "and find a way to nurture," says Thomas. "To build on the strengths of our children is a job for the entire community." On their own, neither a wise nurse practitioner like Thomas nor a wealthy philanthropist like Sloan can remove stresses and risk factors from the lives of minority children growing up in a poor neighborhood. But working together, they can go far to promote resiliency. "If we build on children's strengths and teach them the skills they need," Thomas says, "they will grow up better prepared to cope with the stresses of school, community, and home life."

RESPECTING CHILDREN

Tall and broad-shouldered, with a strong voice that carries across a crowded room, Carla Coffey is a commanding presence. But when she's talking to a young child, this African American woman bends her knees, gets face-to-face, and talks softly. "Respect children," she says, summing up the philosophy that she brings to early childhood education.

ALLIES FOR EDUCATION

Around the globe, Seattle is known as the home of the world's richest man. While Bill Gates-sized billionaires aren't exactly commonplace here, this booming Puget Sound community has plenty of other deep pockets. And increasingly, the city's wealthiest citizens are turning their attention—and sizable resources—to improving education.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, for example, recently established the New Millennium Scholars program to help minority students who want to pursue science and technical studies in college. The project provides annual gifts of $50 million for 20 years—a $1 billion investment. Stuart Sloan, who made his fortune in groceries, software, and auto parts, is contributing $1 million a year to improving an elementary school serving a high-poverty neighborhood. Telecommunications magnate Craig McCaw has donated $2.5 million toward Team Read, a literacy tutoring program. Roger Rieger, a real estate investor, has pledged $l million for programs to support youth at risk. He and his wife Annette also founded the Seattle chapter of the I Have a Dream Foundation, which helps low-income youth attend college. Don Nielsen, a Seattle School Board member who has been successful in the biomedical industry, donated $l million last year to train teachers and establish an endowment for Seattle schools.

To channel and encourage community support for schools, the Alliance for Education was formed in 1995 as a nonprofit partner for the Seattle Public Schools. In 1998, the Alliance raised more than $8 million to support a variety of programs intended to increase academic achievement, ranging from professional development to arts education to school reform, according to the district.

But drumming up financial support is only part of the Alliance's mission. Strategic programs have recruited volunteers from the private sector for a reading campaign, to lead environmental field trips, and to bring teachers up to speed on new technologies.

"Money can make a big difference in education," believes Michelle Bell, an Associate Professor in the Department of Health Services at the University of Washington. If Seattle's most successful citizens want to make an example of themselves, she's all for it. "Imagine what might happen," she suggests, "if every big business decided to take a percentage of profits and put it into education. I don't think we can go wrong by reinvesting in people." ■

Several weeks each year, Coffey travels from Atlanta to Seattle to conduct onsite professional development with the T.T. Minor staff. A specialist in the High/Scope curriculum and a former Head Start teacher, she is helping the school transform itself into a place where the child is at the center of learning. That sounds basic, she admits, but it's often not the first goal in a classroom.

What does a child-centered classroom feel like? That's what Coffey attempts to convey during a recent training session. "It's not laissez-faire, anything goes. That kind of classroom is in chaos. It puts children at risk," she explains. But Coffey doesn't favor the other extreme, either. In what she describes as a "directive classroom," the teacher gives all the orders. That's not effective teaching, she says, "because there will always be a child willing to challenge authority."

Just as she's saying this, Sherrill Adams happens to stroll within earshot. Unprompted, the principal crosses her arms across her chest, gets right up in Coffey's face, and says: "You can't make me! You aren't my mama!" The room erupts in laughter, but the message comes through. Every adult in the room has encountered a child eager for someone to push against.

The ideal atmosphere for learning, Coffey suggests, is supportive. "The teacher shares control with the children. You let them help you solve problems in the classroom. When you see children waving their hands, eager to contribute, you make time to hear what they have to say. You give them lots of opportunities to step to the forefront, so that even the shy child can have a chance to go first. You understand their strengths and their struggles." Most importantly, she says, "You don't tear the child down."

When Adams is hiring new staff members, she looks for specific qualities that will support children's success. "First, I want a person who truly cares about children. You can't teach that. Next, I want people who are willing to learn about themselves. They may have to change on the inside when they come to an inner-city school, especially if they didn't grow up in a neighborhood like this. Finally, I want them to have skills in the classroom. That's the one thing we can teach," the principal says.

As a teacher trainer, Coffey is often asked to consult on difficult situations, where both teacher and child may be struggling. She starts by asking the teacher, "What can the child do?" Often, all she gets is a shrug. When that happens, she tells the teacher: Find out. Then come back and talk to me. "Even the worst child," Coffey says, cringing at her own words, "is doing something positive. And that's where you need to start teaching. Focus on what they can do."

That can-do attitude is intended to spread throughout the school, as all T.T. Minor children become active learners, using research-tested classroom materials. High/Scope, a widely used curriculum originally developed in Ypsilanti, Michigan, is the model being used with pre-K and kindergartners. In High/Scope classrooms, children master skills as they explore designated activity areas. They learn to "plan-do-review" as they engage with manipulative materials. They develop social skills and refine language while solving problems and working cooperatively.

In first grade, the curriculum switches to Purpose-Centered Education, developed at Audrey Cohen College. The Audrey Cohen curriculum, a New American School model, builds children's core academic skills by involving them in developmentally appropriate purposes. They set goals, use their communications skills, and solve problems en route to achieving each purpose. First-graders might decide to invite in experts from the fire department, for instance, to help them achieve the purpose, "We Work for Safety." The long-term goal is to teach children not only how the world works, but that they can make positive contributions to their larger community. "It knits into the whole community as a resource," explains Miller, Sloan's project manager at T.T. Minor Elementary.

PARENTS SIGN ON

Tracie Holiday-Robinson knows the desks, stairwells, and purple lockers of T.T. Minor as well as she knows the decor of her own home. And in a way, enrolling her youngest child here last year felt like a homecoming. This is the school Holiday-Robinson and her siblings attended as children. It's a neighborhood landmark, where Central District families have been sending their kids for generations. But until last year, T.T. Minor was a place Holiday-Robinson worked hard to avoid, even though she lives only seven blocks away.

"I fought to keep my sons from going here," she says. "I didn't think it was a place where young Black males had a good chance to be successful. Nobody seemed to care about this school," she says, explaining why—at least from a parent's perspective—enrollment at T.T. Minor had been in decline before Sloan's program was launched. Her older boys, now 10 and 13, still attend other public schools in Seattle. But when she heard about the new direction T.T. Minor was taking, Holiday-Robinson decided to look into enrolling her daughter in their neighborhood school.

After attending her first parent meeting, Holiday-Robinson admits she was confused by what she heard. "They were talking about child-centered learning. I wondered, what was that?" Although she has a college degree and the experience of ushering three older children through public schools, she wasn't familiar with that approach to teaching young children. The early-childhood classrooms, divided into color-coded activity centers, sounded more like elaborate play spaces than traditional, orderly school rooms. Holiday-Robinson signed her daughter up for the pre-K class, but she also decided to keep a close eye on her progress. And ever since, this mother has been a fixture at the school. "I started out rubbing backs at naptime," she says, laughing. "I wanted to stick around and see what was happening at my baby's school." Staff members—eager to involve parents in their children's learning—were thrilled to have her.

Before long, Holiday-Robinson's phone was ringing with an unexpected job announcement. Since last year, she and a co-worker named Stephanie Hunnicutt have been operating the school's new Family Support Center, another service made possible because of the expanded budget. The center is housed in a comfortably furnished room, complete with sofas and a rocking chair, just down the hall from the main office. Parents can duck in for a cup of coffee, have an informal chat with teachers, or connect with resources ranging from a food bank to a clothing exchange to mentorships for their children.

"We're here to connect families with information they can use as a stepping stone," Holiday-Robinson explains, "to bridge the gap between school and home." She's eager to spread the word, for instance, about college courses being offered at a nearby community center, complete with child care and transportation.

Her close-up view has convinced Holiday-Robinson that the new approach to learning will benefit all children in the school. "I hear my baby use her problem-solving skills with her big brother at home. She'll say, 'OK, you use this toy first. Then I'll use it. Then we'll share and create something together.' She learned to do that here," she beams. Similarly, Holiday-Robinson has been sold on the wisdom of putting children at the center of learning and engaging them in purposeful activities. "I hear my daughter make elaborate plans for what she's going to accomplish in class. Imagine, being that young and knowing you have a purpose, and that it's connected to the whole world.

The goal of nurturing "the whole child for the whole year" means that children receive everything from extra meals to better-trained teachers to outreach for their families. "You have to start young," believes philanthropist Stuart Sloan.

That's wonderful!"

Parents, too, are learning that they have an important purpose in the world of T.T. Minor Elementary School. For the first time in at least three years, a PTSA chapter has been formed this year. Parents have opened their doors to teachers making home visits at the start of the school year. Last year, turnout was near perfect for parent-teacher conferences.

BUT WILL IT WORK?

Ever since Sloan's gift became public knowledge, people both inside and outside the school have been eager to see results. Does money make a difference?

It's still too early to tell. The first achievement tests mandated by state standards will take place next year, when the first "class" enters second grade. Hill, the district elementary coordinator, suspects the tests "will bear out what teachers are telling us anecdotally, that this program is leading to better outcomes for children." Hill has seen kindergartners in the new program mastering skills not usually in place until second grade. "I've seen kindergartners and even pre-K students who are successful readers," she says.

Once students in the Enhanced Program begin taking achievement tests, Adams hopes to raise test scores by 10 points annually, a goal

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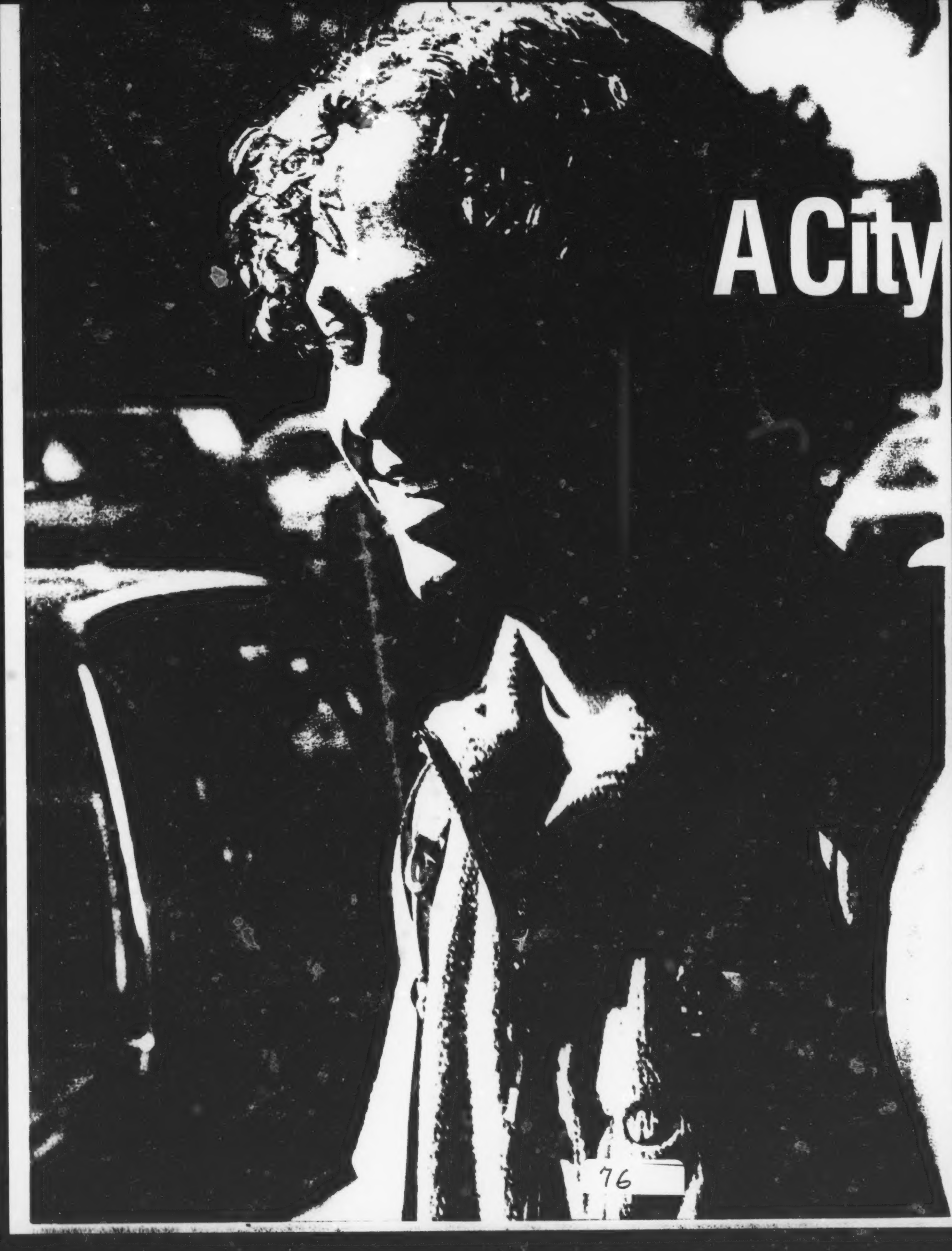
A City



Fit for Kids

BOISE ENGAGES ITS TEENS TO BUILD A YOUTH-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY

Story and photos by SUZIE BOSS

[illegible]

BOISE, Idaho—Age matters.

Just ask the whiskerless 13-year-old studying the goatee on the 18-year-old seated at his side. Or listen to the self-assured 17-year-old who admits she was more shy "back when I was younger." Like, two years ago.

In the life of a teenager, age determines just about everything: How you talk. What you wear. Where you can go. Where you can't. Who you listen to. Who you tune out.

But for teens growing up in and around Boise, age is starting to take on a whole new meaning. In this fast-growing metropolitan region of more than 250,000, where corporate headquarters have sprouted against a high-desert landscape, teens are discovering that youth carries clout. Even though most are still too young to vote, they already have the mayor's ear and a youth council to advance their agenda. The police chief wants to hear their views. Researchers have surveyed them about the issues that affect their well-being. Far from feeling ignored because of their age, young people are developing a strong voice in the life of their community.

SPEAKING OUT

On a recent autumn morning, as sunlight skips across the Boise River and warms the nearby foothills to a golden glow, more than 130 students gather for a daylong summit to plot their community's future. Their mission: Imagine an even better place to grow up.

"You're here to create a vision. You have the power to make it happen," says Amy Denton, a leader of the event billed as Youth Speak Out: A Call to Action! At 24, with wide blue eyes and bobbed hair, Denton looks only slightly older than the teens she's hoping to inspire. A recent graduate of Boise State University, Denton is an ambassador in a program called Youth Engaged in Service (YES), part of the Points of Light Foundation and the Idaho Commission on National and Community Service. She's committed to helping young Idahoans develop leadership skills and connecting them with service-learning opportunities throughout her home state. Today's summit, sponsored by YES and other community organizations, is intended to elicit a list of key concerns from local youth and generate action plans.

Faces In The Crowd

Meeting in a convention center on The Grove, a brick plaza in the heart of Boise's recently revitalized downtown, the teens represent middle schools and high schools from throughout Ada County. Many are already involved in student government and other school leadership activities, but a few have never before had a chance to speak up so publicly. Four students who attend alternative schools in the Boise School District, for instance, "are upbeat about this opportunity to have a voice," observes Edward Mowry, a counselor at Mountain Cove, an alternative high school. Nontraditional leaders have been especially encouraged to attend.

Students at the summit talk about what really matters in their lives

As she looks around the conference room, Jayne Ho-Setantha sees past the typical teen accoutrements of baggy jeans, fleece vests, big shoes, and earrings. She sees a roomful of individuals, "each with a unique contribution. They all have gifts to share." Director of Community Youth Connection—a nonprofit, countywide agency that gives young people opportunities to voice opinions, influence change, and receive recognition—Ho-Setantha is also a mother of three children, ranging in age from 14 to 21. So she knows this territory. Before coming to Community Youth Connection, the transplanted New Yorker channeled the energy of at-risk youth into arts projects for the Idaho Commission on the Arts. She knows that creative energy can be transforming. She's also a big believer in building on the strengths of young people. "Instead of asking what's wrong with kids," Ho-Setantha explains, "I like to ask, 'What's *right*? What are their talents?'"

Given an opportunity like the summit, students don't hesitate to put their leadership skills to work. Each table is led by a teenager who has been trained to be an effective facilitator, to lead without dominating the discussion. Within minutes, the guarded hush of kids who have never met before gives way to animated discussions.

Facilitators ask: "What are the biggest problems facing kids today?"

And the answers bubble up, often backed by first-person narratives or stories about friends struggling to find their way. Kids in Boise—where schools are strong, the local economy is thriving, and parks and outdoor recreation opportunities abound—still shoulder a familiar list of adolescent worries: fitting in; feeling like you have a place; getting along with your parents; cliques; gangs; feeling harassed by police; tension between skaters and jocks; jobs that don't pay enough and entertainment that costs too much; stress; drugs and alcohol; peer pressure; prejudice because of how you look, dress, or act.

Once they've extracted this long list of concerns, facilitators press for active solutions. They ask, "What can we *do* about these problems?" The assembled teens take on this question with such energy, it's as if they've been saving up the answers their whole lives.

FACES IN THE CROWD

Matt Oppenheimer, a facilitator at one of the tables, is also president of the 25-member Youth Action Council, a leadership project of Community Youth Connection. A 17-year-old junior from Boise High School, Oppenheimer wears his curly brown hair parted down the middle. He talks fast and with infectious energy, pausing often to ask, "Does that make sense?" When he's amused, the corners of his mouth turn up and his eyebrows arch like parentheses tipped sideways. He's a big believer in the power of amusement.

"For me, community service is fun. That's why I do it," he says, explaining in a nutshell why he devotes time to two governor's councils, a national campaign to prevent teen pregnancy, a police strategy board, and a variety of other service projects. He suspects more of his peers would become involved in the community, too, if they knew they'd have a good time. "They're not going to want to do things," he says, "if it means sitting in a meeting for eight hours. Teens want to see results." The right spin helps, too, he admits. "I'm sorry if this sounds blunt, but you won't get many kids involved in something that has dork written all over it."

Oppenheimer is savvy enough to know that his own childhood has been close to idyllic. He's lived his entire life, with both parents and an older brother, in the same house on Warm Springs Avenue, one of Boise's nicest and most historic streets. His father is president and CEO of a food processing company;

SCALING UP THE POSITIVES

Is "kid-friendliness" something a community can nurture? A growing consensus among researchers and grassroots activists indicates *it is. Several national efforts are underway* to scale up the positives in the lives of youth.

- America's Promise, founded by General Colin Powell, aims to bring schools and communities together to promote five foundations for positive development: an ongoing relationship with a caring adult, a safe place with structured activities during nonschool hours, a healthy start, a marketable skill through effective education, an opportunity to give back through community service. (Web site: www.americaspromise.org/)
- Communities That Care, launched by Drs. J. David Hawkins and Richard F. Catalano, professors of social work at the University of Washington and directors of the Social Development Research Group, is intended to engage entire communities in addressing youth problem behaviors and promoting positive development. Several states, including Oregon and Washington, use the Communities That Care Youth Survey to measure both risks and protective factors among adolescents. (Web site: www.drp.org/)
- Healthy Communities · Healthy Youth, launched by the Search Institute in 1996, now includes 400 communities in local efforts to promote positive development and build assets in the lives of young people. (Web site: www.search-institute.org/communities/ [illegible])
- Youth Hall of Fame, a project that started in the Seattle area to recognize the contributions of young people, has spread to several communities, including Spokane, Tacoma, and Boise. Youth who have overcome challenges or who have helped others are nominated by friends, family members, teachers, or others in the community. Then, honorees help to create a public art project, such as the colorful mural hanging at the entrance to Boise City Hall. To carry on the positive energy, honorees are matched to be mentors to other youth in a community service effort. (Web site: www.youthhof.org/)

his mother is a counselor in private practice. He loves attending Boise High, housed on the edge of downtown in an imposing building, complete with classical Greek columns. Recently, he was selected as one of 35 youth correspondents to *Teen People* magazine. Although he has been nurtured by love and support at home and enjoys success at school, Oppenheimer has watched many friends grow up under starkly different circumstances. At times, his own good fortune can feel almost embarrassing. But what drives his activism are the friends he cares about. "It's all built around relationships," he says.

One buddy, for instance, gets into trouble so often that Oppenheimer has offered him $50 if he ever stays out of juvenile detention for six months. He knows a classmate whose parents do drugs at home, right in front of their son. At school, he hears a double standard applied to boys and girls who choose to be sexually active: "Girls get called sluts. Guys brag about it." He's become a peer counselor for Planned Parenthood because he thinks "guys need to be more involved in pregnancy prevention." On weekends, he sees kids chugging beer at parties or cruising a popular loop downtown "because they say there's nothing to do. They don't realize there are other ways to have fun." Although he doesn't use drugs or alcohol himself, Oppenheimer still enjoys parties. "I can be there, having fun, not doing it [drugs and alcohol]. My friends know what I stand for." Although he can seem wise beyond his years, Oppenheimer doesn't claim to know all the answers. "Issues need to be approached in multiple ways," he believes. "There are no simple solutions."

Kristin James, a senior at Timberline High, knows firsthand about the challenges that life can throw in the way of a young person. At 17, she's exactly the age her mother was when she was born. When she was two, an abusive former stepfather broke her arm and leg. She didn't meet her own father until she was seven. When her family moved from Utah to Boise two years ago, she found herself doing some major soul searching. "I went through a big transition, wondering who I want to be," she says. One thing she became clear about: "Statistics are high that the child of a teen mom will be a teen parent herself. But I'm not a statistic."

James drew on her own family story to write a powerful speech about teen pregnancy. She won a state competition and went on to compete at the nationals in Boston. That led to her involvement in other youth projects, such as the Idaho Youth Action Council and Commu-

Building A Better Bois

nity Youth Connection. To build her leadership skills, she attended a summer youth retreat organized by Amy Denton, the YES ambassador. And as she has gotten more involved in service learning, James has seen her own confidence take off. Her story brings to life what research shows: that service learning can be a springboard for skill building during adolescence.

"I never used to see myself as a leader," says the soft-spoken James. "But now, even in class, I'm raising my hand, identifying myself as someone who can lead. I'm more confident, not as shy to open up to people." She realizes that she's motivated by "positive energy." Today, positive energy is what has brought her to the youth summit. After she graduates next spring, she hopes to devote more energy to a yearlong service project before she heads to college. "I want to know that I'm making a difference."

BUILDING A BETTER BOISE

For the young people involved in the summit and other recent activities to promote youth involvement in the community, these exercises in citizenship feel new, refreshing, and important. Before attending her first youth summit, Jessi Bodily, a senior at Kuna High School, never imagined that adults would pay attention to what a group of kids might say. "Even though I am a teen, I had disregarded our power," she says. "I hadn't realized that we might get involved to solve these issues, and that it could be fun."

With a strong push from Mayor Brent Coles, Boise is attempting to develop its youth resources in a deliberate, focused way. Using research on resiliency developed by the Search Institute, based in Minneapolis, Boise is working to increase the factors known to support the healthy development of young people.

The Search Institute has identified 40 specific assets as the building blocks of positive development. To gauge a community's health, the institute surveys teens about the good things in their lives, asking, for example, if they receive love and support from family members; if they feel valued by their community; if they feel safe at home, at school, in their neighborhood; if they feel optimistic about the future. The more assets young people acknowledge, the better their chances of avoiding high-risk behavior, succeeding in school, and becoming adults who will contribute to their community.

A recent Search Institute survey of more than 5,000 Boise-area teens shows local youth scoring slightly above their peers nationwide on the assets scorecard. Boise-area youth report an average of 19.3 of the 40 assets in their lives, compared with a national average of 18. In academics, too, Boise students tend to outscore their peers on national and statewide achievement tests.

That's good news—but not good enough, according to Mayor Coles. Under ideal conditions, young people will enjoy at least 31 assets, Search Institute researchers conclude.

Coles is using the assets survey to plan how to bolster support for young people. Under the asset labeled "family life," for instance, 70 percent of Boise-area youth say they enjoy the support of their family. "That's great, but it tells me that 30 percent of our young people need help," Coles says. More telling, the mayor adds, is the measurement of "positive family communication." Only 32 percent of teens surveyed say they seek advice from parents. "That means they're not talking about serious issues at home," Coles says. The mayor is also troubled by a low percentage of teens—20 percent—who say they feel valued by the community.

To show young people that they do matter, Coles has successfully lobbied for an ordinance that calls for a young person to be appointed to each of nine city commissions and boards. The youth members are expected to voice the needs of their peers, so that city funds will be spent on projects that will directly benefit young residents of Boise.

"When we're planning for new parks and recreation facilities," the mayor explains, "we need to be able to have young people involved in the planning and the debate over how to use resources. They'll need to do their homework, to go to their colleagues and gather opinions and ideas. We need to show them that their voice is important. The city that we're planning today," he stresses, "we're planning for the next generation."

Already, for example, young residents of Boise have lobbied successfully for the city to build a skateboard park. By having youth members serve on a variety of working commissions, Coles hopes to continue refining the city so that everything from arts programs to new parks are designed with young people in mind.

Coles has also challenged the business community to connect with young people in positive ways. Building positives into the lives of youth doesn't have to be complicated or expensive, he points out. "At the end of the day, a lot of adults go inside their houses but not into their neighborhoods. We need to encourage adults to talk to kids, one on one. Just have a conversation. It seems so simple." A father of five, Coles acknowledges, "All kids are different. Some will talk to their parents and some won't. They need another

From Talk to Action

adult in their lives."

Bringing more youth voices into community affairs is an idea that will take time and an investment in training. "Young people need to know how to work with adults in a group setting," Denton acknowledges. She tries to build training into service opportunities to give teens a better chance of being successful volunteers. Community Youth Connection also provides training to help build teens' leadership skills "so they can play an effective role," adds Ho-Setantha.

What can organizations get back if they decide to include teens? Seventeen-year-old Jessi Bodily is often the lone youth voice when she attends meetings as part of her internship at Idaho Public Television. But she finds that the adults around the conference table are interested in her ideas. "We young people are just starting to look at life and all the things we might want to do," she says. "We can offer a different perspective. We bring creativity, energy, and passion, and sometimes that can inspire others."

FROM TALK TO ACTION

By the afternoon of the youth summit, two issues emerge as the group's top concerns:

- Tolerance, a broad term meant to encompass issues caused by prejudice, cliques, and stereotypes
- Substance abuse, a problem teens say is exacerbated by peer pressure and lack of attractive alternatives for recreation

"These aren't easy issues," Denton tells the group, "and they're not unique to this community. But you have a chance to deal with them here, now."

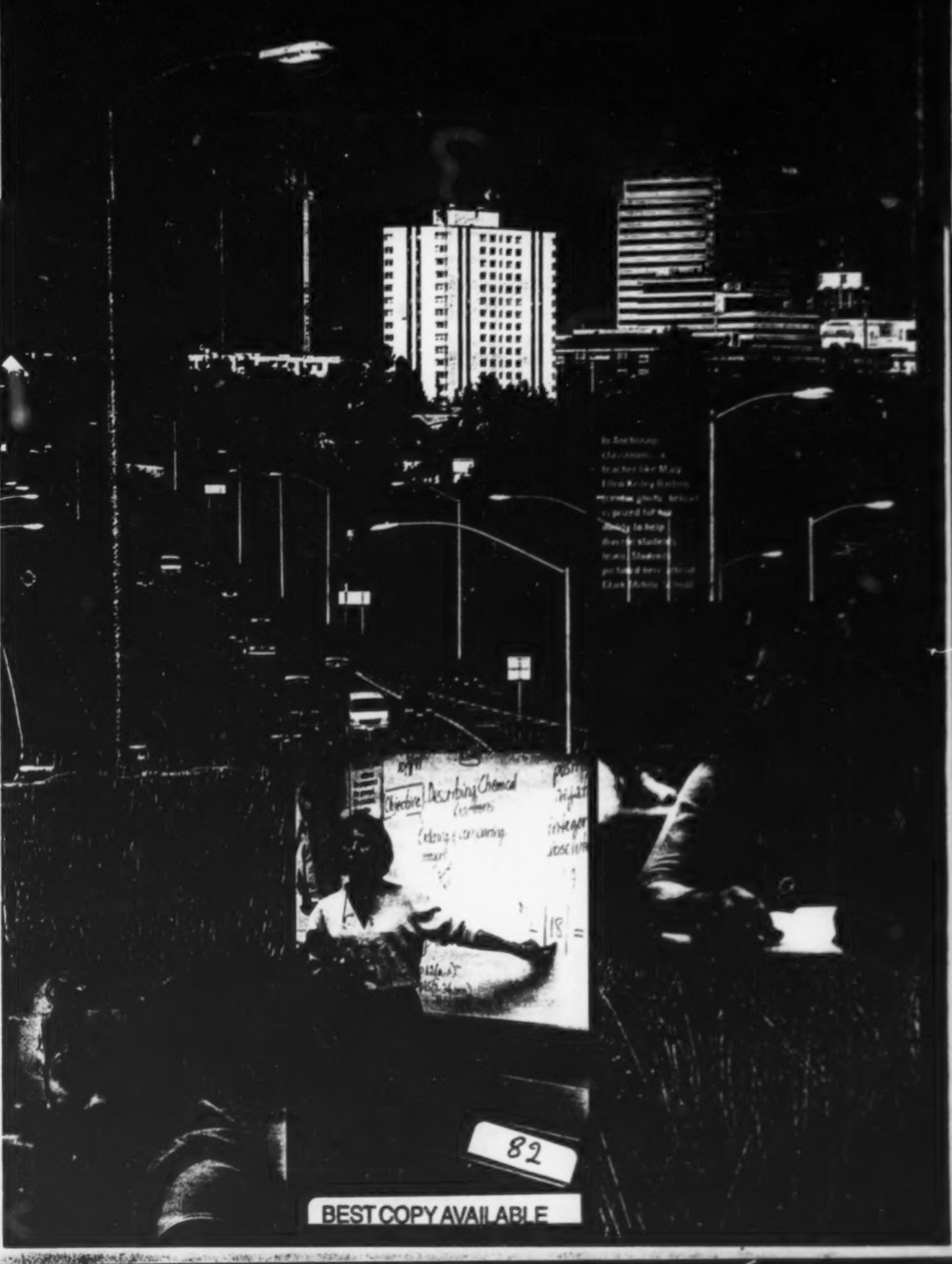
In a free-wheeling, noisy brainstorming process, they attempt to do just that. By the day's end, group applause is loudest for two specific kick-off projects. Clean Rock, which Oppenheimer's table imagined, is intended to be an alcohol- and drug-free entertainment event featuring musicians who can double as positive role models. A Kindness Celebration, for which James and others have advocated, is envisioned as a way to showcase the community's diversity and involve teens as mentors to younger students. These two projects will be the next activities that Community Youth Connection sponsors.

Oppenheimer hopes the energy will carry past this one-day event and spur more teens into action. Community involvement, he has learned, "is like an escalator. If you step on, for the right reasons, it keeps taking you up and up."

Jayne Ho-Setantha smiles as she watches the teens get excited about their own ideas, even though she recognizes the hard work that awaits if they're going to move from talk to action. She's already up to her elbows with other youth-friendly projects. By year's end, she'll be busy coordinating the Youth Hall of Fame, a public art project that honors young people who have contributed to the community. The Community Youth Connection's Youth Action Council hopes to launch a newspaper for teens. And today's summit has resulted in dozens of other good ideas that, with the right energy from motivated young people, could make Boise a better place to grow up. But Ho-Setantha is wise enough to be patient. "We have time," she says. "We can make it happen."

Mayor Coles is already looking forward to three years from now, when researchers from the Search Institute will return for a follow-up assets survey. He's hopeful that some key numbers will improve, especially those measuring whether teens are likely to avoid risky behaviors. "We ought to be able to push this the right way," he says. In the meantime, there's plenty of work to do. Building on the strengths of Boise's youngest citizens, Coles says, "energizes our whole community." ■

Gathering on a plaza known as The Grove, Boise youth come together to improve their community.



In Anchorage classrooms, a teacher like Mary Ellen Kelley Darling (center photo, below) is prized for her ability to help direct students' learn. Students pictured here attend Clark Middle School.

Objective Describing Chemical Reactions

Teachers Wanted: Must Like Snow

Anchorage School District gets creative to recruit staff who can teach to diverse learners in Alaska's urban enclave.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY **DENISE JARRETT**

ANCHORAGE, Alaska—A man and woman climb the steel-grated stairs of the pedestrian overpass, each with a crisp bag holding a new bottle of liquor. They speak low to each other as they cross over the noisy intersection, not returning the nod of a passerby. Below, at a bus stop, weathered men sit on a bench and sip from their own brown bags. Behind them is Clark Middle School; across the street is the liquor store. This is an eastside neighborhood in Alaska's urban enclave, Anchorage, where some 260,000 people live—nearly half of the population of the state—but it could be any scene of urban disadvantage in the Northwest.

Clark Middle School scores the highest of local middle schools on measures of hardship, according to Anchorage School District records. It is by far the poorest middle school in the city, with 60 percent of its students receiving free or reduced-price lunches. Its student mobility rate is also high; nearly half of its enrollment turns over during the school year. For the past several years, students at Clark have scored on or below the 50th percentile on standardized tests in all subjects tested. It's exactly the sort of place that is in most need of expert teachers who can help disadvantaged youths get a toehold on a better life. Yet, during a time of teacher shortages, an urban school like this is often the least likely place to attract them.

But Clark has found a way.

While this community's struggle with poverty and transience are evident on the streets this morning, inside a classroom at Clark, growth and hope are in much display. It's 10 o'clock. Eighth-grade math class is starting. This is Ms. Darling's realm. In here, the October sun filters through the yellowing leaves of birch trees, falling bright on desktops and young faces. Highway traffic may roar outside, and Air Force jets may roar above, but, in here, one can get down to the business of learning.

It's not a magical place. It's orderly, cheerful, rigorous. In here, students can speak their ideas out loud. They don't have to be right, but they do have to try, says Mary Ellen Kisley Darling, 52, whose high expectations are tempered with warm humor. Even those students who are just learning to speak English have to participate.

Half of Darling's students are English-language learners. Darling and bilingual tutor Ina Carpenter, who grew up in the Yup'ik village of Kipnuk in Western Alaska, do double-duty, assisting students with vocabulary, extra time, discussion, review; whatever it takes to help them succeed. Don't tell them you can't do it. Bottom line, you can't quit, says Darling.

To a visitor, she explains: "They have to survive and get along just like everyone else in the nation. I believe all kids can learn, because they can and because I know they *have* to. They have to learn the curriculum that's set out in the state guidelines. It's my job to figure out how to make it work for them."

Indeed, Darling has been making it work for them for a long time. Before relocating to Anchorage four years ago, she and her husband, William, 51, a retired teacher, lived for 25 years in the Bristol Bay community of Dillingham on Alaska's western shore. They raised their two children there, Evan, 20, and Brook, 15. Darling taught eight years in the Dillingham school where 80 percent of her students were Alaska Native youngsters with varying degrees of English proficiency.

Maybe it was there, in that small fishing community, where she figured out how to help language-minority students make sense of English language and Western ideas and culture. Or maybe she learned something about that many years ago. Her own parents moved from Czechoslovakia to the American Midwest as children, their families fleeing persecution and seeking prosperity by farming the rich soil of Wisconsin. Mary Ellen grew up speaking Czech at home until elementary school, when teachers pressured her parents to learn English.

Today, there's a certain quality to Darling's voice that sets her slightly apart. Maybe that's what she thinks about, the apart-ness, when she's teaching her language-minority students. Because that's the one thing she won't allow: separation. You can have your own ideas, but you have to take your place alongside everyone else in her room and speak out. By now, pretty much everyone does.

"They're yappy," Darling says about her students, "but you have to honor that. They're always checking with and helping their neighbors, and as they teach each other, they're reinforcing what they've been learning in class."

This prompts a new thought, and she shakes her dark hair away from her face. "Sometimes, what they're learning clashes with their religion, especially in science. We talk about where science and religion meet or do not meet. You have to recognize those differences. They know things. You've got to acknowledge *them*."

Yagga was a girl who didn't want to be acknowledged. Not at first. She came to the states two years ago from West Africa.

She told Darling, "I don't speak good English so don't ever call on me."

Darling replied good-naturedly, "Guess what? I pick on people!"

"You think I can do this, but I can't," Yagga said.

"You won't get any better if you don't try," Darling told her.

Bilingual tutor Ina Carpenter (right) grew up in a Yup'ik village and now helps students in an Anchorage middle school. Even from urban playgrounds (bottom photo), the Alaska wilderness is never far away. Students attend Clark Middle School.

Darling says she presses her students to be brave and to learn to take care of themselves. It seems to be working. These days, Yagga doesn't wait to be picked on, but raises her hand in class and speaks out.

* * *

Teachers like Darling are prized by school district recruiters. In the Anchorage School District, where 20 percent of the students speak 85 different languages, it can be tough to find well-qualified teachers who may be monolingual but are skilled at teaching core academic subjects like mathematics, science, social studies, and language arts to language-minority students. It's an unfortunate irony that poorer schools with the greatest need are likely to have the least-skilled teachers. These schools are experiencing the greatest influx of students who do not speak English as a first language. People new to this country (as well as other language minorities) who are not affluent often first settle in lower-income neighborhoods where housing is more affordable. Of all the middle schools in Anchorage, Clark has the highest percentage of bilingual students, about 25 percent.

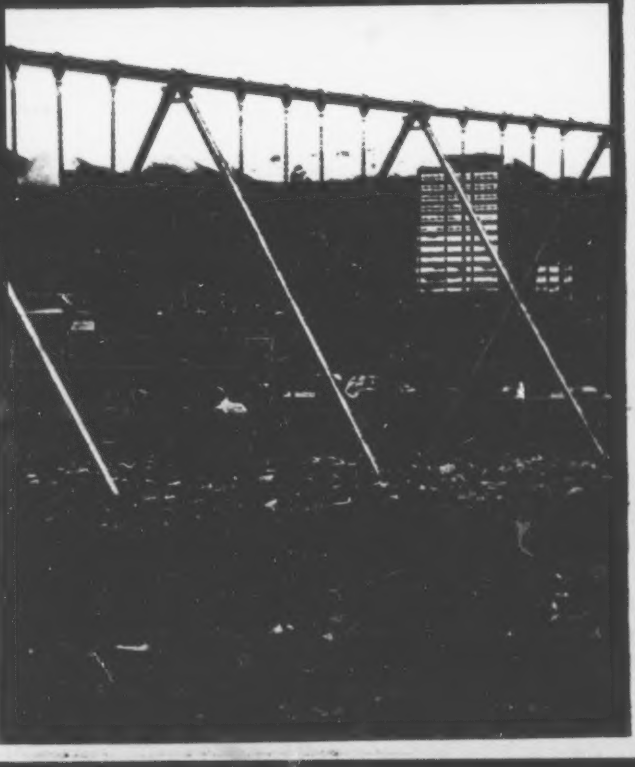
While Darling is the sort of teacher administrators are eager to have in lower socioeconomic schools like Clark, recruiting such experienced staff has gotten especially difficult. Shortly after Darling was hired, the district began limiting starting salaries by capping the number of years of experience teachers could be credited. While Darling received full credit, teachers moving into the district today are credited a maximum of three years. That can mean taking a pay cut of thousands of dollars.

"I'm very lucky," says Darling. "It's a foolish policy. They don't realize how much richness they're losing in teaching experience."

The practice has helped to diminish what not so long ago was a deep pool of experienced applicants, recruiters say. When Darling first started looking for a teaching position in Anchorage, there was a surplus of teachers. In fact, she was told she'd probably have to substitute for several years before finding a permanent job.

"Now, they can't even find enough substitutes," she says.

While there is a need for content teachers skilled in teaching language-minority students, bilingual and English-as-a-second-language



specialists are also sorely needed. Districtwide, more than 4,500 students are receiving bilingual education services, about 9 percent of the student population, says Maxine Hill, bilingual education supervisor. Many of these are Alaska Native students who speak Yup'ik, Inupiaq, Koyukon, Tlingit, and other native languages. But the fastest growing segment of language-minority students consists of youths who have moved to Alaska from distant islands or other countries: Hawaii, the Pacific Islands, the Philippines, Mexico, Vietnam, Korea, Thailand, Russia. Last year, 120 new Hmong students were enrolled. This year, about 140 new Hispanic students moved to the district. The number of new Russian and Albanian students is also increasing.

Language-minority students, in fact, are the fastest-growing group in schools throughout the Northwest. Their numbers have more than doubled in Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington this decade. Increasingly, language-minority students and their families are living in places that have not previously served large numbers of English-language learners. According to the U.S. Department of Education, between 1990 and 1997, the Northwest and Southeast states received the greatest increases of limited-English-proficient students. About that same time period, the Anchorage School District added almost 10,000 new students to its roster; three-quarters of these young people were from an ethnic minority group, district records show. Today, more than a third of all students in the district are minority students.

In addition to second-language specialists, other experts are also in great demand. Special education teachers, speech pathologists, occupational and physical therapists, school psychologists, librarians, and other professionals are needed. School districts are avidly seeking these specialists to fill a need intensified by new immigration, disabilities legislation, information technology, and a growing recognition of the individual learning needs of students.

After years of dipping easily into the scores of resumes sent by teachers eager to work in the state's most urban district, events converged to create a teacher shortage in Anchorage. In 1998, the district offered a state-mandated retirement incentive, persuading many higher-salaried teachers to take a $10,000 bonus for retiring from the district. Three hundred seasoned teachers took the offer. Several other events amplified the need. Under a state initiative, the district reduced class sizes in elementary grades and in core courses in ninth and 10th grades. This, coupled with the construction of several new schools, spread the teaching corps even thinner. Additionally, until this fall when anticipated enrollment dropped by about 1,000 students, enrollment in the district had been steadily increasing, growing by almost 18 percent over 10 years, according to district records.

After hiring between 800 and 1,000 new teachers over a recent three-year period, the district is feeling the pinch, says Teresa Johnson, Director of Training and Professional Development and recent past director of personnel. There's now a dearth of available teachers in such areas as advanced math and science, as well as specialists. For example, there were 60 openings for special-education teachers at the beginning of this school year; nearly half of those positions were still vacant well into October. There's been a pressing need for special-education teachers for several years, says Robyn Rehmann, Executive Director of Special Education. Because Anchorage is by far the largest city in a far-flung state, it receives a large number of special-needs students, says Rehmann. Parents of children with special needs often choose to live in Anchorage precisely because it offers ample social and medical services.

Now is the time to be more creative, says Russ Ament, Personnel Director for the district. Instead of recruiting only on the West Coast where competition for teachers is stiff, partly because of California's class-size reduction initiative, recruiters decided to go farther afield. It seemed to make sense to recruit in same-weather states, places like Wisconsin, Minnesota, the Dakotas, Massachusetts, and New York, where people aren't fazed by months of snow and ice. Also, hiring recent college graduates would circumvent the problem of the three-year limit on credit for experience. District staff set up booths at university job fairs, reaching out to new graduates who might be interested in an Alaska lifestyle.

This is an important consideration. It's not uncommon for someone to accept a teaching position in Alaska, only to find the winters not to their liking and leave after the first year. Of four new teachers hired last year from one university, two declined at the last moment, and another left Alaska as soon as school ended in the spring. Targeting states with similar weather has resulted in some successes, says Ament.

"To me, we have one of the greatest national treasures and that's the state of Alaska. It's not for everybody, but it has a small population so you can still make a difference. And you're one mountaintop from unspoiled wilderness," he says.

* * *

In Buffalo, New York, recently, the Anchorage district's Teresa Johnson recruited a young woman who had just completed a master's degree in library science—another high-demand area—who seemed a particularly promising candidate: She was highly qualified and she loved winter sports.

"I remember her so well. She'd already been on the Internet and completely researched Anchorage, the cost of living, and had a list of questions for me," recalls Johnson. "She and her husband are interested in outdoor activities: winter camping, fishing, and snowshoeing. Her personal interests coincided with some of what the state has to offer, so it seemed like a good match."

Heather Fleming, 30, is now a librarian at Central Middle School of Science, an innovative school in a mixed socioeconomic neighborhood of Anchorage. For her and her husband, Patrick, 31, who is a carpenter, living in Alaska is a childhood dream come true. Nevertheless, the decision to move north—rather than to their warmer choices, Arizona or North Carolina—took some mulling over. Alaska can be not only cold, but expensive. The cost of living in Anchorage is about 25 percent higher than in Buffalo, with housing costs some 40 percent more, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

During her final year in the library science master's program at State University of New York in Buffalo, Fleming heard that the Anchorage School District was recruiting on her campus, looking for librarians, special-education teachers, and other hard-to-find teachers. She signed up for an interview. What about the cost of living? she asked. In Alaska, she learned, there is no sales tax, no income tax, and residents receive annual dividends of as much as $1,700 from Alaska's Permanent Fund (a state investment fund derived from oil revenue in which half of annual earnings are distributed to Alaska residents). By her calculations, that made up for the higher costs. Before she left the interview, Johnson told her that if she wanted it, the job was hers.

In the end, the Flemings decided to exchange warmth for the pursuit of adventure. Newly married, they packed their truck with possessions and drove up the Alaska-Canada Highway, or Alcan as the 1,400-mile road is popularly known. Built by World War II soldiers, the road wends northward from Great Falls, Montana, through three western Canadian provinces, to Fairbanks, Alaska. Camping in Canada's spectacular national parks, the Flemings celebrated their honeymoon on the road. The wilderness and expansive skies of the sub-Arctic terrain nursed their imaginations about what awaited them in their new hometown. But what they found in Anchorage wasn't what they were expecting.

"It was shocking to see that it is so urbanized," Fleming recalls. "You come to Alaska thinking you're going to be living in the great outdoors, so it was surprising to find how much of a city it is."

Johnson was there to smooth the transition. She put the couple up in her own home, drove them around the city to acquaint them with their new community, and helped them find a mechanic to fix their truck's engine, which had succumbed to the beating it got on the long, hard drive. Johnson's care and nurturing of the newcomers paid off. Unlike many newly arrived teachers, Fleming didn't leave after her first year.

It's now her second year at Central, and she and her husband are happy with their new life. In Alaska, they discovered, escape from urban congestion is not far away. An hour's drive can remove one to untrammeled solitude in the Chugach Mountains or the outdoor chic of a ski resort. Last winter, the two spent their leisure hours snowshoeing through white scapes of spruce and birch. This winter, they're looking for a house to buy. ■

A HERO'S WELCOME

Partnering with schools and families, Tony Hopson and his crew at Self Enhancement Inc. are transforming the community, one child at a time.

Story and photo by Samantha Moores

Tony Hopson is at the center of a community effort to help children overcome barriers to success.

PORTLAND, Oregon— Tony Hopson knows the neighborhoods of inner North and Northeast Portland. He grew up here, so the area's problems and challenges are no surprise to him. He knows that, with the highest rates of unemployment, poverty, and violent crime in Oregon, this pocket of the city is often short on heroes and hopeful attitudes. He also knows that this doesn't mean the kids in his community can't have big dreams and bright futures.

Just look at what this North Portland kid has accomplished.

As founder and director of Self Enhancement Inc., Hopson, 45, spends his days nurturing dreams and cultivating hope. His nonprofit youth program works with kids from inner-city schools in the Portland district, supporting them in their academic classes, helping them develop new talents and skills, and teaching them the values and attitudes they need to become positive, contributing members of society.

Back in 1981, when Hopson was a young teacher at Jefferson High, SEI was born as a one-week summer camp that blended basketball drills and scrimmages with academics and life skills. That one-week camp stretched to two camps, then four. Fueled by grants, government contracts, and donations, SEI is now a year-round operation, with a full-time staff of 75, onsite coordinators in 11 schools, and extensive after-school and summer programs.

Nearly three years ago, SEI got a permanent home when Hopson opened the Center for Self Enhancement. Anchoring a small city park once controlled by drug dealers and gangs, the $10 million, 62,000-square-foot community center boasts multiple classrooms, a gymnasium with a regulation basketball court, an auditorium, recording and dance studios, a library, a computer lab, and a cafeteria. As Hopson moves through the center, greeting kids and catching up with staff, it is clear that this is a man who loves his job. Meetings and phone calls may consume much of his time these days, but his open manner and ready smile make Hopson accessible to folks from the community he serves.

"When I was growing up, I could always envision a positive future," he recalls. "We had role models that helped to motivate us toward something better. We had parents who were willing to pass on the skills and the knowledge needed to be successful. And I had a good peer group that challenged me to be the best that I could be."

The 1,200 kids SEI serves each year don't have a lot of role models elsewhere in their lives. Most are from single-parent homes below the poverty level. Many are in foster care, or living with grandparents. A lot of these kids are not getting what they need, in both their families and their schools, stresses Hopson.

SEI is designed to fill in the gaps in these kids' lives. For its school-based program, full-time coordinators serve as student advocates at five elementary schools (Applegate, Boise-Eliot, Humboldt, Vernon, and Woodlawn), three middle schools (Ockley Green, Tubman, and Whitaker), and three high schools (Benson, Grant, and Jefferson). Many are schools where student performance is lagging. Coordinators help each student develop an Individual Success Plan, where they set academic and social goals and plan strategies to meet them. They also work with teachers to make sure kids are keeping up in classes, and they meet with families to get them more involved in the school.

A structured after-school program complements the in-school support. Twice a week students stay after school for homework help and tutoring, and a curriculum that touches on drug and alcohol awareness and violence prevention; other days they ride a bus to the Center for Self Enhancement. After a snack and a mandatory homework period, kids pick two electives from a roster of academic classes and recreational activities: band, cartoon drawing, African dance, Fun with Numbers, reading enrichment, and much more. With budget cuts trimming the arts from many school schedules, this is often the only exposure students have to subjects like music and visual art.

"We're trying to expose them to enough things so that we can find out what button turns them on," says Hopson. "And if you can find that, you've got them. Because now you can use that one thing to push them in a variety of other positive directions."

Daymond Glenn remembers well the "push" he got from SEI. As a freshman at Grant High, Glenn signed up for a summer basketball camp because he "got a free pair of shoes at the end." Now a poised, articulate 26-year-old, Glenn is starting his third year as the SEI coordinator at Vernon Elementary. More than any activity or curriculum, the program's power lies in the relationships it fosters, Glenn believes. "There are so many intangibles that we do," he explains. "That's the beauty of SEI. Just checking in with kids. Saying, 'I like your outfit,' or, 'Your hair looks nice today.' Giving them a hug. A lot of the kids are withdrawn socially. To see them break out of their shell or light up when I enter the room—it's awesome."

Students are selected for SEI's program according to a "barriers list," which catalogs a number of risk factors, such as low economic status, single-parent households, foster care, academic deficiencies, behavior problems, and so forth. More than 90 percent of participating students are African American, and about 50 kids are chosen from each school. Of these, 60 percent are "Greatest Impact Kids" (those who have a number of risk factors); 30 percent are "Intensive Intervention Kids" (those with nearly all of them); and 10 percent are "Leadership Kids" (those who demonstrate leadership qualities in school and among their peers). While SEI spends about $2,500 a year per child, families pay nothing for the program. For just $40 a year, students who aren't selected can participate in SEI's after-school, weekend, and summer programs. An additional 400 kids are currently taking advantage of these programs.

"Everything at SEI is done with class," notes Vernon Elementary Principal Linda Wakefield. Wakefield has worked with SEI for years, in three different schools, and has seen firsthand what it can do for students. "They have high expectations," she says. "That's so important, especially for the kids who may not get them anywhere else."

What sets SEI apart from other youth programs? Four things, according to Hopson:

1. The relationship model. Rooted in African tradition, this model is at the core of SEI's philosophy. According to the model, staff move in and out of three roles—parent, mentor, and instructor—in interacting with kids.

2. Continuity of services. Children begin the program at age eight, and can continue with it until they are 25. They work for years with coordinators who are often the only constant in their lives.

3. Comprehensive programs. SEI works with kids in school, after school, during the summer, even on school holidays, so they get year-round, consistent support. Accredited summer classes allow students to make up lost credits and meet benchmarks.

4. A family-based approach. Because at-risk kids usually go home to at-risk parents, SEI works with families to help them deal with their circumstances. This helps prevent a negative home environment from offsetting the positive gains children make.

SEI has earned numerous awards and accolades, including recognition from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control for being a national model of violence prevention. But, for Hopson, the best barometer of the program's success is what former SEI kids, like Glenn, are doing with their lives. (For an interview with another SEI student, see Page 46.) Says Hopson:

"The ultimate goal for us is to raise up kids that can be positive role models to other kids. To raise up individuals that can contribute to society and be willing to give back, in the way that we're trying to give back. So that all of this kind of perpetuates itself."

In Portland's inner-city neighborhoods, the cycle has already begun. ■

URBAN NORTHWEST BY THE NUMBERS

Continued from Page 10

Urban districts in the Northwest, by comparison, tend to have a smaller percentage of minority students. Seattle is the most diverse of the large districts in this region, with 40.6 percent of students being non-White (24.7 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 22.8 percent Black/non-Hispanic, 8.9 percent Hispanic). In both Anchorage and Portland, about two-thirds of students are White. In Anchorage, the largest minority group is American Indian/Alaska Native (11.5 percent), followed by Black (8.7 percent), Asian/Pacific Islander (7.8 percent), and Hispanic (4.9 percent). In Portland, the largest minority group is Black (16 percent), followed by Asian/Pacific Islander (8.6 percent), Hispanic (6.4 percent), and American Indian/Alaska Native (2.3 percent).

Poverty, a factor in most of the large urban districts, appears to be less prevalent in the Northwest. In the 100 largest districts, 49 percent of students were eligible for free lunch in 1995-96, compared with 35 percent of students nationwide. In Portland, 32 percent of students were eligible for free lunch; in Anchorage, 17 percent qualified. NCES did not have a comparable figure available for Seattle. During the 1998-99 school year, however, Seattle reported 41 percent of its students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, a percentage that's been declining since 1996.

Urban schools in the Northwest also invest more per pupil than other large districts. The average per pupil spending in the nation's 100 largest school districts in 1996 was $5,513, compared with $6,343 in Anchorage; $6,622 in Portland; and $6,723 in Seattle.

Sources: Characteristics of the 100 Largest Public Elementary and Secondary School Districts in the United States: 1997-98 (National Center for Education Statistics, July 1999); Estimates of the Population of Metropolitan Areas (U.S. Bureau of the Census, July, 1996).

THE EDUCATION OF AN ANGEL

Continued from Page 27

she considers within reach. In the meantime, she appreciates Sloan's patience. "He hasn't tried to micromanage this program," says the principal, "and he's putting money where he said he would."

In her ongoing evaluation of the program, Michelle Bell has had a chance to talk with parents, teachers, administrators, and community members, as well as the board of trustees that oversees the additional support program. Her report at the end of the 1998-99 school year highlighted both accomplishments and challenges. She found students excited about learning, parents pleased to be connecting with needed services, and school staff pulling together as a learning community. Communication between school and home needed work last year, Bell says, but continues to improve.

Communication has been an issue within the building, as well, Hill adds. "We could have done a better job last year with orientation of new staff. This year has been better. All teachers are learning more about the new curriculum models. It's becoming a more seamless school."

To measure the school's success, Bell has designed an evaluation matrix that looks far beyond the classrooms of T.T. Minor Elementary. In the coming months, she'll be measuring not only student learning, but also the concept of "affiliation," which refers to the relationships between school and student, between teacher and student, between community and school. Finally, the evaluation will assess "well-being," a broadly defined measure of health that reaches into the whole community.

Earlier this fall, a groundbreaking ceremony took place for a new community playground on the land adjoining the school. This project is not another gift from Sloan, but an investment by the city. An asphalt lot is being transformed into a grand neighborhood gathering place, complete with gardens, theater space, and playing fields. Holiday-Robinson guesses that more than 400 people turned out for the ceremony. One of the faces she spotted in the crowd was a veteran teacher from T.T. Minor. "You should have seen his face," she relates. "He kept saying, 'Imagine! A grassy playing field!' For 28 years, he's been holding his gym classes on pavement."

But brighter days are ahead for children in the Central District, thanks to a millionaire's gift and a community wise enough to run with it. ■

LESSONS FROM THE CITIES

Continued from Page 11

bring more persons of color into Portland classrooms. Participants, according to Director Deborah Cohgrave, "are people who know this community, know the reality of an urban classroom, and are passionate about wanting to make a difference." Similarly, Pathways to Teaching Careers, an initiative funded by the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, works with model programs on 42 college campuses to recruit and train teachers for schools serving low-income neighborhoods.

Such outreach efforts can be expected to increase as urban districts struggle to fill openings with qualified staff. In August, for instance, HUD rolled out the Teacher Next Door initiative, offering incentives for teachers to purchase homes in low-income neighborhoods targeted for revitalization. Like the department's popular Officer Next Door program, which has helped 2,700 police officers buy homes, the new teacher incentive is designed to encourage teachers to live in the neighborhoods where they work.

And the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, recognizing "a special emphasis on the ... teaching needs of urban districts," has launched an Urban Initiative, with the Ford Foundation pledging $1 million to help city districts recruit and keep well-qualified teachers.

Closing achievement gaps

Although many urban districts are reporting steady gains in student achievement, gaps remain nationwide between the performance of rich and poor, White and minority students. In an effort to narrow the gap, the Council of the Great City Schools launched a Task Force on Achievement Gaps earlier this year. And 14 relatively affluent districts have formed the Minority Student Achievement Network to seek solutions to academic performance gaps between racial and ethnic groups.

Many urban districts are putting more muscle and resources into efforts to help lower-achieving students meet performance standards. In Portland, for instance, the district has provided extra help and more funds for 25 schools where students consistently achieve below goals. In Seattle, extra dollars follow low-income, lower-achieving students to the schools where they enroll. The "weighted students formula" is intended to target resources to students who need them most.

In *The Challenge of Detracking*, a 1998 ERIC report, authors John H. Lockwood and Ella F. Cleveland point out that "excellence" has been the rallying cry to improve student achievement while "equity" refers to access and participation in a quality education for all students. The two terms should not be mutually exclusive, the authors argue.

Indeed, research shows that raising expectations promotes a culture of excellence within a school that can benefit all students.

To champion high expectations among minority students, the Urban League has launched the Thurgood Marshall Achievers Society as part of the Campaign for African American Achievement. A national honor society of Black students, grades three to 11, the Achievers Society underscores the importance of high expectations and attempts to counter negative peer pressure. Supported by the Congress of National Black Churches and a grant from the Lilly Endowment, the campaign urges African American parents and community members to demand more from their schools and to press harder for changes that will translate into better student performance, according to *Education Week*.

Exemplary classroom instructional and learning environments, according to researchers at the Laboratory for Student Success, can increase students' self-esteem and academic achievement and reduce their alienation and boredom. City schools can become "islands of tranquility" in the sometimes unsettled lives of urban students, report Hersholt C. Waxman and Shwu-yong L. Huant.

Involving families in learning

Like parents everywhere, most urban parents are eager to support their children's school success. Dr. Joyce Epstein, director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University, has found that, when schools encourage parent involvement, students do better on everything from homework to attitudes to overall achievement. But parents don't automatically know how to help, especially if they lack a formal education themselves. Increasingly, teachers and schools are finding ways to bring parents into partnership to promote student learning, reinforce the curriculum, and strengthen positive study habits and social skills. In *Partnering with Parents to Foster Learning at Home*, Epstein offers specific suggestions, such as:

- Ask parents to regularly read to their children and/or listen to their children read aloud
- Lend books, workbooks, and other materials to parents
- Give an assignment that requires children to ask their parents questions
- Help parents provide appropriate rewards and/or penalties based on school performance and/or behavior
- Ask parents to observe the classroom with particular attention to teacher strategies
- Provide parents with hands-on learning to build their teaching techniques

In September, NWREL's Equity Center sponsored a two-day symposium for parents and educators. Dr. Reginald Clark—a prominent researcher and consultant who also happens to be the grown son of a teen mother from an inner city—summarized four key ways that parents can boost their children's academic achievement:

- Create a comfortable environment for learning.
- Make your home a place where your child feels secure, connected to adults, and safe.
- Expect your children to do well and to go far in school. Help them imagine the idea of college and believe they can succeed in higher education.
- Work with teachers and other adults to help your child set goals and plans for how to be successful in school.
- Help your children organize their time and activities in a way that enables them to be competitive with their classmates.

Online sources. These Web sites offer more resources and research about education in the nation's cities: Council of the Great City Schools (www.cgcs.org/); Equity Center of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (www.nwrel.org); Laboratory for Student Success, the regional educational laboratory with a specialty area in urban education (www.temple.edu/departments/LSS/); Urban Education Web maintained by ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education (eric-web.tc.columbia/edu/). ■

CHANGING COMMUNITIES
Large suburban districts wrestle with urban issues

By DR. YVONNE KATZ

I VIVIDLY REMEMBER my first visit to the Beaverton School District seven years ago as a finalist for the superintendent's job. Beaverton had a reputation as an academic powerhouse and was considered the epitome of the "white bread" suburban school district, which experienced few, if any, urban-style headaches.

As I prepared for my interview with the school board, I was struck not by the differences between suburban Beaverton and urban school districts, but by the similarities. Beaverton was growing more racially and economically diverse by the minute. It was facing severe cuts in programs and staff due to declining and unstable state resources. Issues of safety and security were surfacing in the community and the schools.

Beaverton was shedding its homogeneous image, as these statistics illustrate:

- From 1988 to 1998, the percentage of minority students grew from 7 percent to almost 23 percent, or 7,123 students.
- The percentage of students enrolled in English as a Second Language programs was steadily increasing, and now has reached 8 percent with 61 languages being spoken in our schools.
- In 1993, 19 percent of district students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. At a few schools 50 percent did so.
- Student mobility was becoming an issue with 25 of every 100 students entering or withdrawing from district schools during the school year.
- The district dropout rate was steadily increasing, moving from 3.6 percent in 1991 to 8 percent in 1998.

During that first visit it became clear to me that while the Beaverton community recognized the district was growing—from 1990 to 1998 student enrollment increased by 26 percent, or more than 6,400 students—few seemed to notice and understand the impact of Beaverton's increasing diversity. And without a clear understanding of its direction, the district would be unable to meet the needs of *all* its students.

As superintendent, my first task was to create awareness among staff, parents, and community members of Beaverton's changing demographics and the implications of growing diversity. Armed with solid demographic data and research, I went out into the community, holding:

- **Rap Sessions**—I went into the homes of parents and community members, meeting with small groups to listen to community concerns and discuss district issues.
- **School Visitations**—I went to every district school to meet with staff and, again, listen to concerns and discuss issues.
- **Public Presentations**—I hit the speaking circuit, visiting with local service, business, and public affairs groups to share the Beaverton Schools story.
- **Meetings with Administrators**—In both formal and informal meetings with administrators, I stressed the importance of using data to drive decisionmaking.

My second task was to work with the entire community to reaffirm the district mission, goals, and priorities—the district's planning document that drives all that we do. We did this by bringing together the various district constituents—minority students and parents, non-English speakers, parents of talented and gifted students, homeschoolers and private school students, clergy, senior citizens, business leaders, staff—to discuss, identify, and define a common set of values and beliefs. We used focus groups, large inquiry groups, forums, and surveys to gather, process, and reaffirm community input. We provided simultaneous language translation, food, child care, and transportation to ensure that all could participate.

From this ongoing process, we developed the district's strategic vision, which serves as the foundation for how we, as an entire community, address key district issues including safety, equity, diversity, and high expectations for all.

For example, through our discussions, we learned that the district dropout rate is a key concern in our community. From our data, we learned that our dropouts are disproportionately male and belong to a minority group, particularly Hispanics. We learned that a majority of dropouts leave school in September and at the end of the first academic term. We learned that students drop out for a variety of reasons, including conflicting family responsibilities, the need to work, falling behind on graduation requirements, and the inability to form connections in a large school setting.

Based on this information, we have developed and implemented a wide variety of programs to address this issue and keep students in school, including:

- **Evening Academy**—An individualized credit-recovery program that helps students make up credits so that they can graduate on time.
- **Night School**—A comprehensive high school program that allows students to attend school in the afternoon and evening Monday through Friday, while holding down jobs during the day. On Fridays, students participate in internships, community service learning, and job shadowing.
- **Freshman Transition**—Each high school has implemented a program that links incoming freshmen with upperclassmen who can answer questions and smooth the transition to the high school setting.
- **Catapult**—A school-within-a-school program that provides students who are experiencing extreme academic difficulty with a different educational environment. Monday through Thursday, students take core academic classes as well as a guidance seminar that focuses on development of study skills, positive work habits, self-confidence, etc. On Fridays, students participate in career exploration and internships.
- **JumpStart**—A program designed to aid former dropouts who are returning to school. Participants attend the program for three hours a day and receive specialized instruction in language arts, math, and personal development. The rest of the day, students attend another district high school program.

We offer these programs in addition to our options programs (Community School, Continuing Education for Young Parents, magnet and specialized programs) to ensure that all students can find a program that fits into their schedule and provides a comfortable environment in which they can succeed.

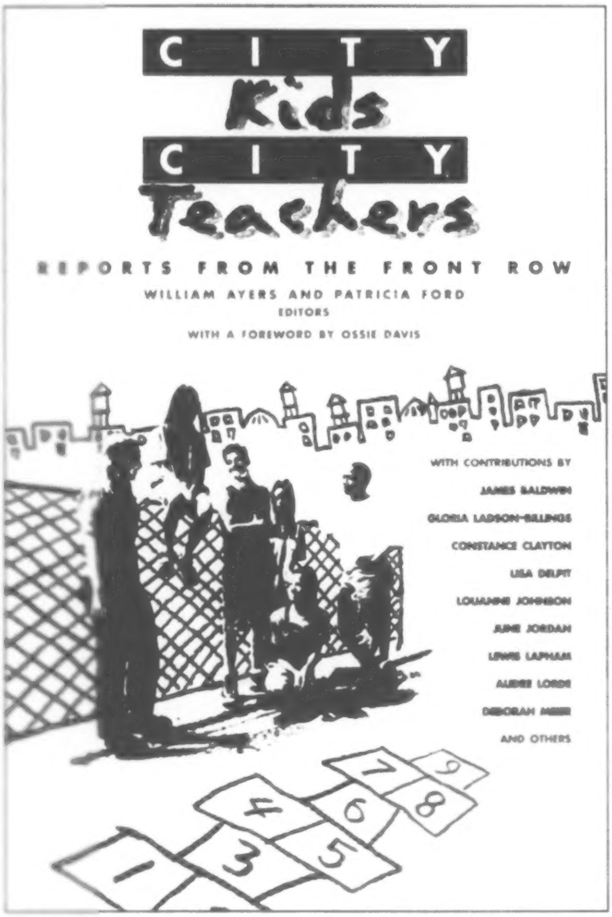
We apply the same process of analyzing data, understanding implications, and developing strate-

Continued on Page 47

TWO RECENT BOOKS from the mainstream press put a human face on the urban youth whose life challenges and obstacles to academic success are more typically documented in scholarly research. Christina Rathbone's *On the Outside Looking In: A Year in an Inner-City High School* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988), and Ron Suskind's *A Hope in the Unseen: An American Odyssey from the Inner City to the Ivy League* (Broadway Books, 1998), provide full, rich portraits of students struggling to find their way in two of America's most visible urban school districts.

A HOPE IN THE UNSEEN: Suskind, a Pulitzer-Prize winning writer for the *Wall Street Journal*, follows Cedric Jennings from Ballou Senior High School in Washington, D.C., to the ivy halls of Brown University. It's a rough journey, with many surprising turns. Jennings—an academic all-star in a school where smart, ambitious Black kids are taunted and bullied by their peers—maintains pinpoint focus on his goals. His mother and his church offer bedrock support. But his urban education is full of yawning holes, and his father is either absent or in prison during most of his childhood.

Suskind sticks tight by Cedric's side for nearly three years—from church services to poignant moments with his mother to disagreements with his privileged White roommate at Brown. This book goes far beyond the tale of a ghetto youth overcoming the odds; it paints a complex story of a boy growing into manhood. Along the way, Suskind explores such thorny issues as affirmative action, race relations, and educational opportunity gaps that SAT scores can't begin to measure. Dreaming about the Ivy League schools located so far from his neighborhood, Cedric tells the high school teacher who mentors him, "I know it's crazy, but I believe that's where I belong, even if they're places I haven't really seen." As Suskind relates in this remarkable story, Cedric is a boy who needs "something to push against" to become the man he wants to be.



ON THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN: After a decade in New York, writer Christina Rathbone had lived in all corners of the city, traveling from "the wealthiest enclaves to some of its poorest neighborhoods." She had written about helicopter pilots, perfume creators, and tugboat captains, but "never so much as spoken to an inner-city teenager." If she saw teens clustered on street corners, she would automatically cross the street. Not until she stepped onto their turf—the urban high school—did she stop thinking about city kids only in negative stereotypes.

Through Rathbone's eyes, readers get acquainted with the students and staff of West Side High School, a "last-chance high" for youth who have fallen out of the educational mainstream. School is only one place where they've known trouble. Many have been abused, neglected, or kicked out by parents; arrested for drugs or violence; recruited by gangs or drug dealers. But these gritty details tell only part of their story. As Rathbone gradually realizes, "Simply knowing the truth was just the beginning, not the answer at all. Doing anything to change the truth was—well, an entirely more complex affair." Throughout the book, Rathbone shadows Ed Reynolds, the West Side principal who tries to salvage his students' lives. Some will fall through the safety net Reynolds and his teachers cast. But many make it through, inspiring Rathbone—and readers—with their courage and grit.

CITY KIDS, CITY TEACHERS: *Reports from the Front Row* (The New Press, 1996) records the voices of students, teachers, and scholars engaged in shaping urban classrooms across the country. Editors William Ayers and Patricia Ford, both with the University of Illinois at Chicago, share their own powerful bias: "… knowing city kids as learners, discovering them as three-dimensional beings, as fellow creatures, is an important place for teachers to begin."

Teaching the diverse learners who attend urban schools requires "multiple entry points to learning," the editors argue, "an assortment of pathways to success." And success is not an unreachable goal, as this collection of thoughtful, passionate essays reveals. The editors point the way to "an urban pedagogy … built on the strengths of the city, the hope and the promise of city kids and families, on the capacities of city teachers."

"NOTHING YOU HAVE DONE, *no class you've taken, no course load you've endured, no job you've worked is as hard as teaching these children. You ask yourself, Why am I doing this and when can I quit?"*

So begins *Who Will Teach for America?*, Michael Shapiro's account of the successes and failures of the Teach for America program, a national effort to recruit some of the nation's most elite college graduates to help solve the teaching shortages in inner-city and

Continued on Page 47

SHINED BY THE CITY

For Alisha Moreland, big dreams become reality

PORTLAND, Oregon—Along Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, sounds of progress fill the afternoon air. Hammers pound. Bulldozers growl as they rearrange the landscape to make way for new housing and new businesses. This stretch of Northeast Portland, buoyed by Enterprise Community investments, is undergoing a long-sought economic revival. And in a popular neighborhood coffeehouse a block off MLK, a poised young woman pauses during a busy day to talk about her own progress.

Alisha Moreland is a Dreamer. Back in the fifth grade at King Elementary, she was part of the first class of city kids "adopted" by the Oregon chapter of the I Have a Dream Foundation. Modeled on a program started in 1981 by New York millionaire Eugene Lang, I Have a Dream now includes more than 160 chapters in 57 cities. The Portland sponsors dangled a life-changing offer to young Alisha and 107 of her classmates, many of them children of color, living in poverty, being raised by single parents and by grandparents. The sponsors told them: Stay in school and we'll help you get to college. Dream big, they suggested. We'll be here to help.

Now 19, Moreland is a thriving sophomore at Stanford University. A 4.0 graduate of Jefferson High School, honored as Portland's Rose Queen for 1998, and also a participant in Self Enhancement Inc. (see related story, Page 39), she has embraced the idea of dreaming big dreams. She expects to be in school for many more years. Becoming a pediatric neurosurgeon takes time.

Before she headed back to California for this school year, Moreland talked with *Northwest Education* about the real-life challenges, experiences, and relationships that have fueled her dreams and sustained her faith. What has helped this city kid succeed?

MORELAND: Being where I am today had nothing to do with Alisha alone. It's the community. It's people who have embraced me. It's been a blessing. No one does anything alone.

NW EDUCATION: Where does your drive to succeed come from?

MORELAND: For some people, it's just in them. Others need more of a push. But either way, what's important is to have people step in and say, 'Hey, let me help you. Let me show you. Let me refine you.' I was open enough to say, 'OK, I want to learn.' I could see that these people are wise. They have lived life and they have something to offer me, and I definitely want to accept it.

NW EDUCATION: So mentors have been key?

MORELAND: My goodness! My grandmother. My godparents. Ken Lewis from I Have a Dream. The neurosurgeon who took me under his wing and let me watch him perform surgeries while I was still in high school. And I've gotten to see that everything that successful people have gotten, they've worked hard for it. What amazes me is if people are afraid to work hard. They're afraid they might miss out on something. It's funny because, when you're afraid to work hard, you do miss out.

NW EDUCATION: The year that you graduated from high school with an armload of honors and a bright future ahead of you, the district moved to reconstitute Jefferson High School because of consistently low achievement scores. How did you manage to thrive in an environment where many other students were struggling to master the basics?

MORELAND: If you look at Jefferson from the outside you'd probably say, 'What a horrible institution of learning.' But I am telling you, looking from the inside out, I saw people working hard. I saw amazing talent. I love Jefferson to death. I came out well rounded, well prepared. We had excellent teachers who were building solid relationships with students. Yes, there were kids who could not meet the standards. But if people would look holistically, they would see that it's more than a Jefferson High School problem. It's more than a Northeast Portland problem. It's more than living in the 'hood, as some would say.

NW EDUCATION: What do students living in high-poverty neighborhoods need to help them achieve?

MORELAND: The tools are the same at every school, but the problems are different at a school like Jefferson. There are kids who can't read in the fourth grade. And they come to high school and they still can't read. At schools like [more affluent] Lincoln or Grant High, there are also kids who can't read. But not so many.

And if you come from an environment that has said, 'You can't succeed here,' then it's difficult. The peak of learning takes place between the ages of zero and four, so the parent piece is important. It takes breaking down attitudes that have been developed over generations. And change is incremental. It takes time.

NW EDUCATION: How can we break down negative attitudes about learning?

MORELAND: Students will learn for you, if you're a good teacher. Once they recognize that what they are doing is investing in themselves, then they start to take a personal interest in their own education. Americans think so quantitatively. We need numbers—*show me the numbers*. But I'm talking about qualitative things. At the heart level, that's where it starts, with a teacher dealing with students where they're at. Personal successes need to be acknowledged. Everyone needs a pat a on the back that says: *I see you. I see what you're doing and that's wonderful. I appreciate you.*

NW EDUCATION: So we need to build on success?

MORELAND: I'll share a story with you. When I was younger, I was given a book called *Gifted Hands*. It's an autobiography by Dr. Benjamin Carson, a pediatric neurosurgeon and African American man who's at the top of his field. I sat down and read it in one day. Talk about people succeeding through the hardest times! His dad left him, his mother only had a third-grade education. He had anger problems. He wasn't good at math in elementary school. But his science teacher saw that he had an interest in rocks and helped him develop that interest. Here was an adult who saw that he was good at something, even though he wasn't that great at math. Once you're good at something, then you have the grounds to learn about everything. It gets you going. And I know that everybody is good at something.

NW EDUCATION: What lessons from your urban education have helped you so far at Stanford?

MORELAND: You have to deal with all sorts of people in college. I had a taste of challenges before I went to college and I've had exposure to many different people. That's called life preparation. So I felt prepared—academically, but more important, socially prepared. I'm also not afraid to speak up in class. Some people are so well spoken, but there's no substance. I'm not afraid to say, I don't hear you saying anything. That heightens the discussion. It's something that I learned, living in a community like Northeast Portland. I've heard politicians come to this community and make promises and use flowery speech—and do nothing. So I'm not impressed by words. And finally, I know that it's good to be involved. The busier I am, the more effectively I manage my time.

NW EDUCATION: How can the community help more students succeed?

MORELAND: In my life, people kept popping up, asking me, 'How are you doing, Alisha? What can we do to make things better?' People need that. Don't complain about what students can't do. If you know math, come tutor for an hour. We need to know that you're going to be there. Don't just tell me I'm good, then leave me in the dust to figure it all out by myself. Be there. Be persistent, consistent, and insistent. That's what will make a difference in a young person's life.

IN THE LIBRARY

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rural classrooms.

Although the book was published in 1993 after the first year of the program, the stories it tells still ring true for new teachers and those who haven't forgotten what it's like to be a rookie in the classroom. The book profiles seven newly recruited teachers who struggle with their own lack of formal teacher preparation and their students' negative attitudes toward education. A recent M.I.T. graduate who has loved science all her life lies awake at night, trying to find a way to make her junior high students "think that learning about the classification of species was, if not essential to their lives, nonetheless interesting." A young woman with a degree from Georgetown returns to the New York slums where she grew up, hoping to make a difference in the lives of kindergartners. In the neighborhood with the highest murder rate in the city, she hears from her students "how Mommy's boyfriend beat up Mommy, or how Daddy is in jail or that Daddy is dead because somebody shot him." She longs to protect them, but she also wants "to cover her ears and hurry away." An idealistic young graduate of the University of Minnesota learns the hard way about the need to maintain order in the classroom.

Along with finely crafted teacher portraits and glimpses into urban classrooms, Shapiro mixes in opinions from educational experts and reformers such as James Comer of the Yale University Child Study Center and Linda Darling-Hammond, formerly of Columbia University's Teachers College. In the end, he offers more questions than answers about how to solve the teacher shortage in urban schools. But the questions make for thought-provoking reading. The young people who volunteer for Teach for America, he points out, wind up asking themselves hard questions, too: "Was their impact as fleeting as a footprint in the sand? Or did something they say, or something they did, light a spark that might make a child see school as they had seen it?"

For more information about Teach for America, see the Web site: www.teachforamerica.org, or call 1-800-832-1230, ext. 225.

—Suzie Boss

WHAT WORKS

Continued from Page 44

gies congruent with our common values and beliefs to address each of the wide variety of issues we face—increased diversity, increased poverty, academic achievement gaps, and school safety, to name just a few.

Through this approach, we have capitalized on our entire community's best thinking and resources to address what truly are community issues and do what's best for all kids.

Dr. Yvonne Katz is Superintendent of Beaverton School District. She has been recognized as an outstanding school communicator by the National School Public Relations Association, which awarded her the Bob Grossman Leadership in School Communications Award for 1999.

DIALOGUE

QUESTIONING SUCCESS, PART ONE

It is interesting to me that the Lab publishes a magazine which has an article entitled "Stepping Up the Rigor: A Rural Oregon School Embraces Success for All" (Fall 1999).

This article seems to be expressly endorsing Success for All as a "cure" for low reading achievement. So is the Lab throwing its weight behind a specific program such as Success for All, which has little research to support it other than that done by the person who created it? What is the Lab's position in regard to supporting entrepreneurial products? Just wondering.

Carol Lauritzen
Professor of Education
Eastern Oregon University
La Grande, Oregon

QUESTIONING SUCCESS, PART TWO

There are problems with the article "Stepping Up the Rigor" (Fall 1999) in that it begins to describe Success for All (SFA), but continues to discuss what Lake Labish Elementary School did before adopting the program. On page 29, paragraph 5, the article reads, "The school's new reading program is a case in point . . . ." This entire paragraph, plus the next paragraph, describes what Lake Labish used to do for reading instruction before they adopted SFA. The paragraph on page 30 that begins, "For the reading blocks to work. . . ." onward is fine. In Success for All, we do not have students rotating in stations.

Basically, the article begins describing adopting a new program, but is actually still describing Lake Labish's past techniques. If the article described the old methodology and then began to describe how it had changed on page 30, that would work!

Lydia Glassie
Success for All Consultant
Education Partners
San Francisco, California

Editor's note: We're sorry if the article "Stepping Up the Rigor" (Fall 1999) created confusion about how Success for All is designed and how it fits into the overall reform program at Lake Labish Elementary School. At that school, the model is woven in and around other strategies already in place. Some readers were unclear about which features of the school's program are features of Success for All, and which are not.

In our view, the school's efforts are exciting precisely because the staff worked hard to find a way to blend the model into their ongoing reform efforts. The result is a unique approach that fits the school's particular staff and student needs. In highlighting a school that has chosen to adopt an off-the-shelf model, the Laboratory intends no endorsement or recommendation of that model. Rather, our intent is always to show our readers what's happening in the region's schools and to let them form their own opinions about what they see.

We welcome letters from our readers. Write to us by e-mail: shermanl@nwrel.org.

Or use traditional mail:

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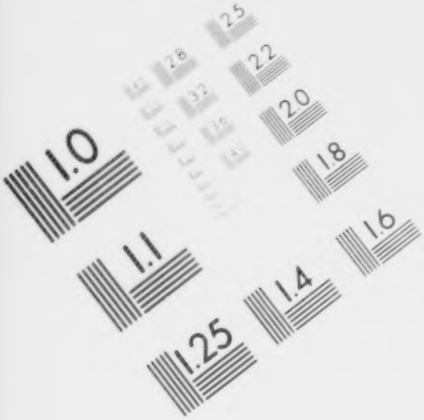
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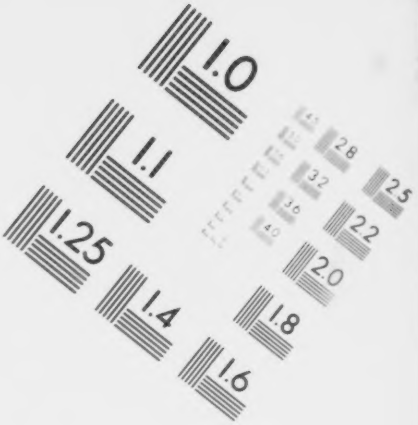
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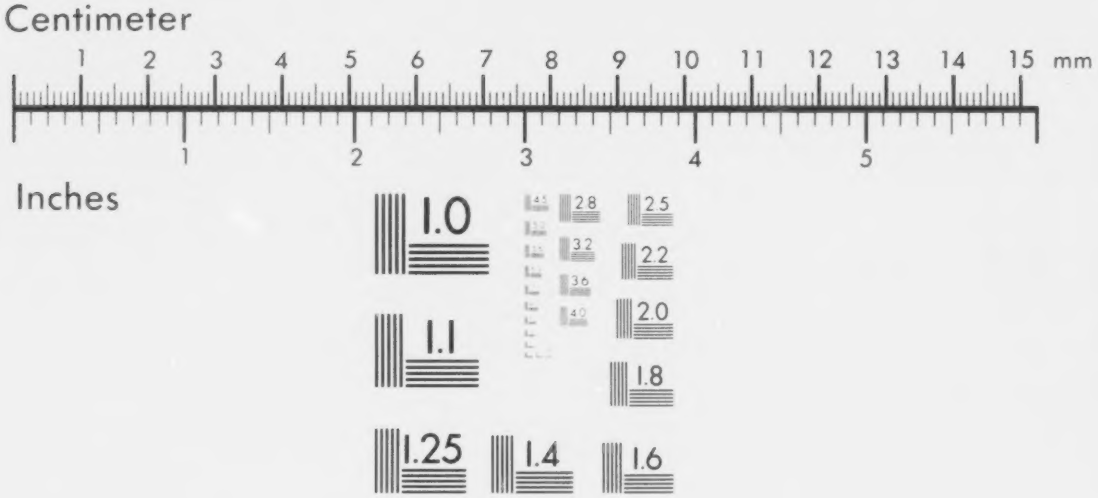
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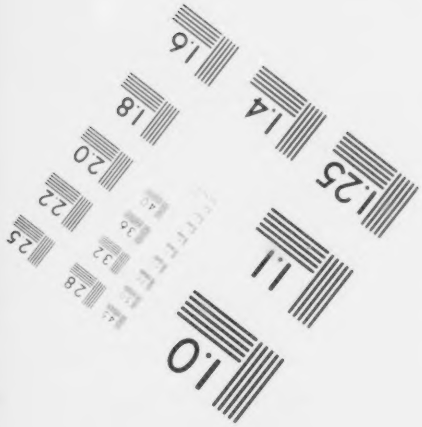
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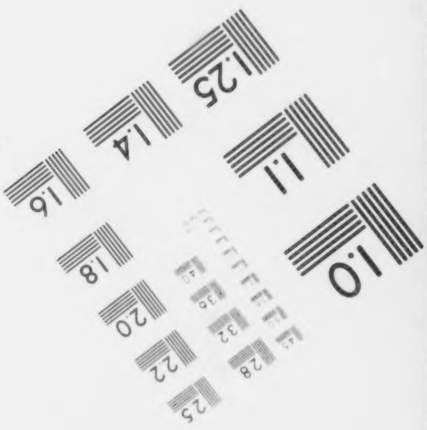
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Healthy Kids, Healthy Schools: Teaching Students to Take Care of Themselves

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identify places where good things are happening,
provide descriptions of effective techniques being used,
suggest useful resources, and submit letters to the editor.

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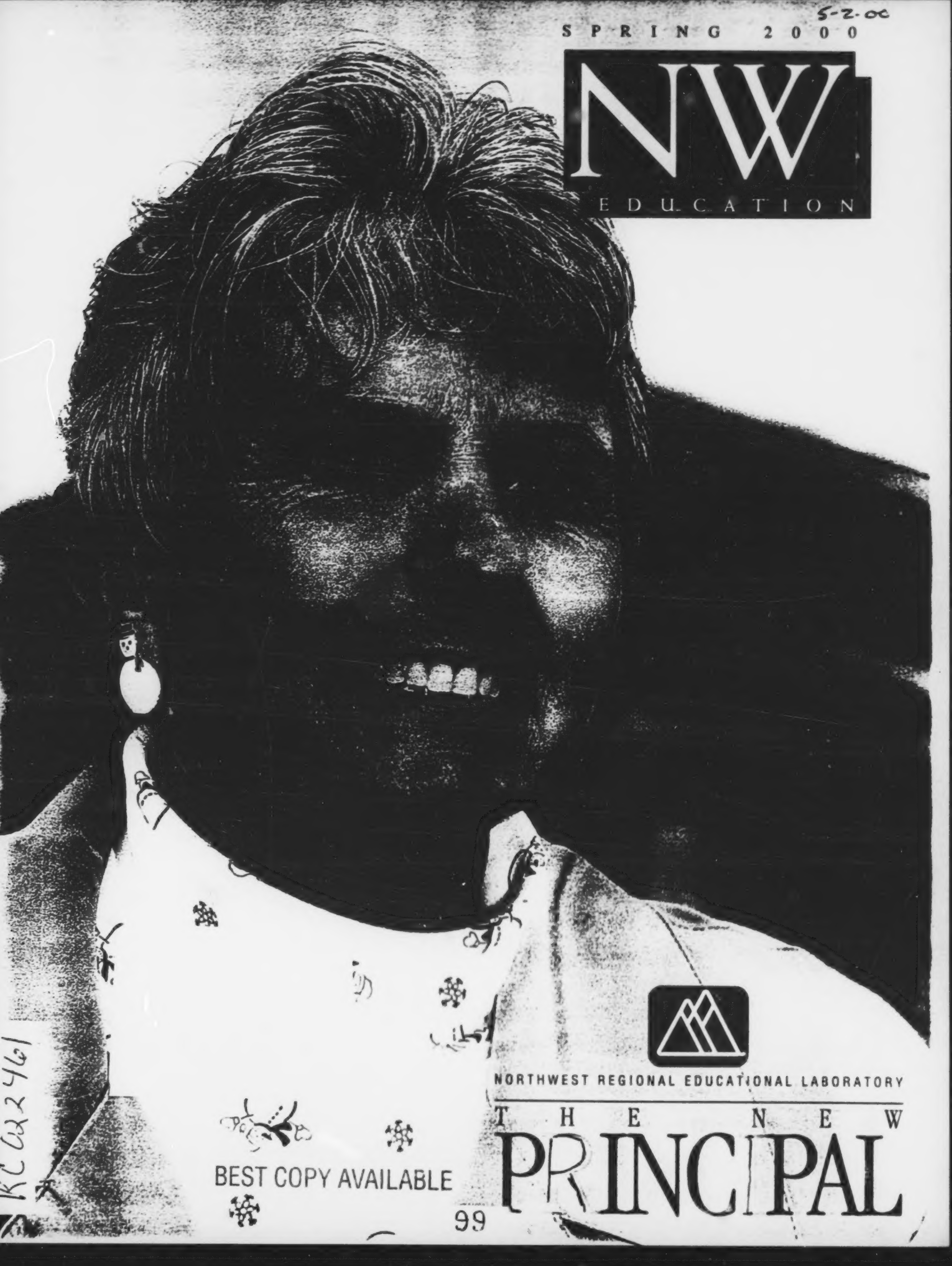

NORTHWEST REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY

THE NEW PRINCIPAL

RC022461

VOLUME 5 NUMBER 3
SPRING 2000

ON THE COVER:
Debbie Toy, Principal of Trail Wind Elementary School in Boise, was named Idaho's National Distinguished Principal for 1999 by the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the U.S. Department of Education.
PHOTOGRAPH BY JUDY BLANKENSHIP

The New Principal

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As schools face increasingly intense scrutiny from the public and policymakers, successful principals are working in a collaborative spirit with a wide range of stakeholders to meet reform goals.

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So Far, and Yet So Near
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  Chris Borgen of Anacortes, Washington
- **The Good Humor Man**
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Seattle is ahead of the pack in preparing and training principals for the growing demands of a job that's tough—and getting tougher.

DEPARTMENTS

44 Principal's Notebook

In the elementary school of my 1960s childhood, the principal was a shadowy figure who existed more in legend than in fact. We knew there was a principal because teachers invoked his title to maintain order and discipline. The words "sent to the principal's office" were words you never ever wanted to be connected with your name. Kids who did wind up in that dreaded place were the only ones who ever set eyes on the fabled administrator, as far as I know. As a good girl who always followed school rules, I dodged the principal altogether. Looking back, I can recall no image of the man rumored to occupy the chair of ultimate authority in the building. Not a face, not a name, nothing beyond a vague sense of unease.

"I didn't have any idea what the principal's role was, except to scold the kids," says my sister, who came three years behind me at the same North Seattle school.

[illegible] day. Certainly, [illegible] altered much of the principalship. The building [illegible] you'll find about in these times [illegible] certain to have tangible impressions on the students—both rascals and angels—under their stewardship. These principals rarely cloister themselves in their offices. Instead, they're abroad in the school, [illegible] and [illegible]. They know each teacher's strengths and [illegible]. They greet each child by name—might even wrap that child in a loving hug. They lead by listening. They make change by collaboration. They succeed by, above all, caring deeply about the people in their charge.

Research tells us that principals are the linchpins in the enormously complex workings, both physical and human, of a school. The job calls for a staggering range of roles: psychologist, teacher, facilities manager, philosopher, police officer, diplomat, social worker, mentor, PR director, coach, cheerleader. The principalship is both lofty and nitty-gritty. In one morning, you might deal with a broken window and a broken home. A bruised knee and a bruised ego. A rusty pipe and a rusty teacher.

Coauthors Richard Ackerman, Gordon Donaldson Jr., and Rebecca van der Bogert capture the enormity of the job in their 1996 book *Making Sense as a School Leader*. The principalship, they say, is about "working toward justice, developing fine teaching, cultivating high achievement with wholesome personal qualities, promoting growth within the limits of your resources, changing practices while respecting everyone, creating collective ownership of and responsibility for kids' learning, and establishing the school as a community of autonomous, creative people."

Here we look in on [illegible] of the Northwest's best principals who are guiding their schools toward excellence while earning the affection and respect of their staffs, students, and communities. In these schools, even the "good" kids know the principal.

—*Lee Sherman*
shermanl@nwrel.org

SHARING THE LEAD

The best principals open their doors wide and invite everyone to join the decisionmaking process.

By LEE SHERMAN

SEATTLE, Washington— One midwinter morning, as fat, wet snowflakes plop halfheartedly on Queen Anne Hill, moms and dads gather in the John Hay Elementary School library for the Tuesday Tour—a weekly event in January and February. In their weather-defying gear of Gore-Tex and fleece, they're dressed for the serious business of "school shopping." All over Seattle, parents are traveling slick streets under brooding skies in an earnest quest for the best blend of curriculum and caring personnel.

A striking woman in an ankle-length skirt, black blazer with beaded cuffs, and chunky necklace strides into the library, and mingles informally with the parents of next fall's kindergartners.

"Are You a kindergarten teacher?" one mother asks her.

"No," Joanne Testa-Cross replies cheerfully. "I'm the principal." To the mom's embarrassed apology, she gives a reassuring smile.

Testa-Cross shows off her school like a Realtor displaying a prize property or a vendor unveiling a hot new line of goods. Once upon a time, neighborhood schools could count on a captive population of children. No more. Many districts have, like Seattle, moved to open enrollment, where kids can choose any school they like. Private schools, home schools, charter schools, and magnet schools are siphoning off still more students. Schools are competing hard. And principals are on the hot seat.

"Marketing and PR are a huge part of what school leaders do these days," Testa-Cross observes after the tour. "We are very mindful that parents are our customers."

In this superheated environment, "external relations" are chewing up increasing chunks of principals' time. A 1995 study by the Association of Washington School Principals found that nearly 85 percent of principals are "spending more time and energy on issues of public relations and in making presentations to the community," researchers Bradley Portin, Jianping Shen, and Richard Williams report. They also found that "client satisfaction" carries a lot of weight in schools these days. More than 90 percent of the principals surveyed said parents now figure more prominently in their decisionmaking.

The need to package schools and sell them to the public is just one of the many ways the principalship is morphing. School improvement trends over the last decade are radically reshaping the schoolhouse's top job. Today's principals have new tasks in their in-boxes, new priorities on their agendas, and new relationships with everyone from the superintendent to the custodian. They collaborate more. They listen more. They devote more time to mixing with kids and working with teachers than to shuffling through papers and refining procedures. Bus schedules and leaky faucets go to the bottom of the stack, while the real mission of school leadership—hammering out a workable vision for teaching and learning—gets top billing.

All of this is happening under a microscope. Intense scrutiny—not only from the central district office, but from lawmakers, reporters, and local watchdog groups—is cranking up the stress levels for principals.

The job demands are expanding precisely as the pool of school leaders is shrinking. Experts predict a dire shortage in the next decade as aging principals retire and baby-boom-echo enrollments swell. Many districts in the Northwest and, indeed, around the world, already are scrambling to find able administrators.

Suddenly, school leadership is on everyone's radar screen.

"In recent months," *Education Week's* Lynn Olson wrote in January, "a broad consensus has emerged across education, governmental, and philanthropic groups on an urgent need to address what many see as a scarcity of strong leadership in public education." In its ongoing series examining school leadership, the newspaper leaves no doubt about leaders' front-row seat in the school reform movement: "Study after study shows that a critical factor in determining whether schools succeed or fail is the quality and stability of their leadership."

TRUCKLOAD OF TASKS

The principal's post is changing at warp speed. Yet today's typical principal doesn't look a whole lot different from yesterday's—50 years old, White, with 25 years in education, 10 as a teacher. The big change is in gender: A principal is much more likely to be a woman today than even a few years ago. More than 40 percent of elementary principals are now women, up about 20 percent in just a decade. Overall, the percentage of female principals rose from 25 to 35 percent between 1987 and 1993, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

While women have made big inroads in building leadership, minorities have not. More than 17 percent of students nationwide are African American (32 percent in central cities). Yet only 11 percent of elementary principals are African American, a U.S. Department of Education study found in the mid-1990s. Fewer than 5 percent of principals are Hispanic, despite an exploding Hispanic enrollment that tops 14 percent nationally and 24 percent in the inner city. Just 1 percent or less are Asian/Pacific Islander or Indian/Alaska Native.

The nation's principal force of 80,000 is expected to swell by as much as 20 percent in the next five years as enrollments surge. At the same time, close to half of K-8 principals are expected to quit or retire in the next 10 years. On the plus side, openings create opportunities for diversity and innovation. On the downside, attracting capable candidates is getting tougher as the job itself becomes increasingly taxing. The typical principal puts in a grueling 54-hour week—nine hours longer than in 1978, researchers James Doud and Edward Keller found in a 10-year study by the National Association of Elementary School Principals. And the pay, many principals say, fails to fully compensate for the sacrifices in personal time and the headaches of a bloated duty roster. While the average principal makes $60,000—about $20,000 more than the average teacher—the gap narrows when you compare principals' pay with that of veteran teachers. Olson points out in *Education Week* that an experienced high school teacher who takes on coaching or after-school club supervision can earn as much as an entry-level principal.

Already overworked and underpaid, principals now must heed the cries—growing ever louder—for standards and accountability. The standards movement calls for schools to align their curricula with district, state, and, in some cases, national frameworks. And, when test scores come back, newspapers trumpet stories on Page One about which schools are meeting standards—and which ones are falling short.

In Seattle, districtwide principal training has shifted its focus this year from leadership skills to the district's new academic learning standards, which are aligned with the state's benchmarks. Joanne Testa-Cross isn't worried; her school's scores are on target. But other principals are nervous. Rewards and consequences for building leaders will depend on how their teachers and students perform, according to Pat Kile, Vice President for Strategic Initiatives at Seattle's Alliance for Education.

"Principals will be held accountable for what goes on in their school," says Kile, whose organization sponsors the district's Principal Leadership Institute (see story on principal training, Page 40). "I think it's imposing a whole lot of stress on lots of people in the district."

Keeping your eyes on stringent new standards while

"Perhaps the most important ability of today's school leader is to be a culture builder, one who instills the values of concern for others, personal and group success and continuous improvement."
—Stephen Stolp and Stuart Smith
School Culture and Climate: The Role of the Leader

Seven Tips for Changing Your Perception of Power

By C. Cryss Brunner

1. Know that while collaborative talk about power does not always make the walk, it certainly helps.

School leaders who can talk about power as a collaborative concept are at least aware that they can be considered powerful even when they shared decisionmaking. For most, in fact, this understanding is enough to make them collaborative leaders.

2. Understand that collaboration is not delegation.

Principals who are collaborative leaders remain in the discussion. They do not turn decisions over to individuals or groups. Instead, they remain active in the decisionmaking process, giving themselves one vote when the decision is made. This is a difficult thing to do. First, people in the school must know that the principal values their opinion. That leads to the third point.

3. As a principal you must know that everyone in the school is as capable in decisionmaking as you are.

Knowing that others are capable decisionmakers rests on one important fact: that everyone is informed. This leads to the fourth point.

4. SHARE ALL INFORMATION—communicate with everyone.

"Knowledge is power." Withholding knowledge is a top-down move. If true collaboration is to occur, everyone must know everything of importance related to decisions being made. For example, gone are the days when budgeting is a hidden process.

5. Include EVERYONE in the decisionmaking process.

This means invite everyone. Do not select or appoint. Let others decide whether the decision will impact them or not. This sounds extreme, but it is the mentality that is necessary to really be collaborative. Establish formal processes that allow this inclusion.

6. Establish a climate where decisions are not made quickly.

Collaboration takes time. Important decisions require input, research, and collective thought—this takes time. Make this understanding a priority of the school. Poor decisions cost more time in the long run than collaboration.

7. Expect other opinions.

Don't be afraid to change your mind. Indeed, don't make up your mind quickly; remain open. Admit you could be wrong. Collaborative leaders must be able to listen authentically. That is, what they hear should impact and even change their thinking. Without this ability, a principal will not be trusted. The collaborative process will be a sham.

C. Cryss Brunner is Codirector of the Joint Center for the Study of the Superintendency and a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. This list was adapted with permission from the American Association of School Administrators, "Leadership News," June 9, 1999.)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

steering a truckload of other tasks down the road requires some clever maneuvering. Education Secretary Richard Riley summed it up in a September speech when he said, "Principals have to be close to magicians to balance day-to-day demands while redesigning their schools for the future." The 10-year NAESP study found no fewer than 12 major areas of principal responsibility:

- Supervision/contact with staff (highest priority)
- Curriculum development
- Discipline/student management (third highest)
- Student evaluation/placement
- Safety/security issues
- Planning/conducting staff development
- Interaction with students (second highest)
- Interaction with central office staff
- Parent/community contacts (fifth highest, after "other" category)
- Facilities management
- Budget administration
- Special duties assigned by the central staff

Faced with this triple-trailer task load, principals must prioritize. The research holds important clues to which tasks are linked most closely with kids' academic performance. "Studies consistently point to one leadership behavior in particular that is tied to student achievement: sustaining a schoolwide purpose focusing on student learning," write Stuart Smith and Philip Piele in *School Leadership: Handbook for Excellence* published in 1997 by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management in Eugene, Oregon (see sidebar, Page 8).

Bess Keller, writing in *Education Week*, concurs. "More and more research suggests that … an aggressive, achievement-centered approach pays off," she says. She cites a recent study led by Willis Hawley, Dean of the School of Education at the University of Maryland. In schools big and small, in communities rich and poor, the common denominator for high performance was a principal who demanded high-quality teaching, tracked student achievement, and recruited good teachers—in short, they are instructional leaders, Keller reports. "Principals of the less successful schools," she notes, "functioned more as managers, and had low instructional expectations for teachers."

The twin prongs of the principalship—leadership and management—receive much discussion in the leadership literature. John Pejza, in a paper presented to the National Catholic Education Association in 1985, cuts right to the heart of the distinction between leadership and management when he says, "You lead people; you manage things." While a principal's "to do" list will always include managerial duties, it's the instructional side of the job that should get the lion's share of her time and attention, most experts agree.

"A dominant belief in policy circles, driven in large part by the academic standards movement, is that principals, instead of being building managers, should become leaders of instruction—dynamic, inspirational educators focused almost exclusively on raising student achievement," Olson asserts in *Education Week*.

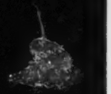
Here's the catch: Unless and until schools can afford to hire two people at the top—one to handle building operations and another to focus on teaching and learning—principals are responsible for both. Portin and colleagues point to this constant push and pull as contributing to a "decline in morale and enthusiasm" among building leaders.

But this is where another trend in the principalship—shared decisionmaking—can come to the rescue. Sharing the lead means sharing the load. And, research suggests, principals who blend strong instructional leadership with a collaborative style also get the best results from the classroom. A 1997 Chicago study, for instance, found big differences in leadership between low-performing schools and schools that had made recent strides in student achievement. Besides having stronger local school councils, the high-performing schools had

"Leaders who see themselves as stewards will be able to create school communities that are both collegial and responsive to the needs of community members."
—Larry Lashway, JoAnn Mazzarella, and Thomas Grundy
School Leadership: Handbook for Excellence

A leader's competence is most clearly manifest in the ability to empower and inspire others."
—Stuart Smith and Philip Piele
School Leadership: Handbook for Excellence

principals who: (1) involved teachers more in school decisions; (2) emphasized teaching and learning; and (3) monitored follow-through of school improvement plans. The study's author, Donald Moore, Executive Director for Designs for Change, says: "The study suggests that an instructional leader having a clear vision for the school and high expectations but open to the views of others … is good for the school."



PROFESSIONAL GIVE-AND-TAKE

Many scholars are in fact refining the idea of instructional leadership to reflect this finding. Instructional leadership, they argue, ought to be done in a collaborative—or facilitative—fashion. Organizations work best, writes Larry Lashway in *School Leadership*, "when employees at all levels are actively engaged in solving problems. The leader's role is to get that involvement." Facilitative leadership, he says, "is based on mutuality and synergy, with power flowing in multiple directions." The old model—the leader issuing edicts from the point of a pyramid—is looking as quaint and out-of-date as poodle skirts and pegged pants. The enlightened leader of today works in the background using a process Lashway calls "professional give-and-take" to move the school forward.

David Conley and Paul Goldman identified the key strategies used by this new breed of leaders in *Facilitative Leadership: How Principals Lead Without Dominating*, published by the Oregon School Study Council in 1994. Facilitative leaders:

- Overcome resource constraints
- Build teams
- Provide feedback, coordination, and conflict management
- Create communication networks
- Practice collaborative politics
- Model the school's vision

This last strategy, "model the school's vision," can happen only if and when that vision is clearly drawn. "If there is one broad area of agreement among researchers, consultants, those who teach prospective principals, and the principals themselves," Bess Keller writes, "it is that schools must have a clear idea of what they are about."

The vision is not plucked from thin air. Nor is it imposed from above. Rather, it must take root in the school's history—the shared norms, beliefs, traditions, and myths of the school community. This deeply embedded context in which the school operates—what researchers call school culture—is the seedbed from which a guiding vision must grow. Only by knowing and understanding her school's quirks, cliques, penchants, piques, feuds, dreams, and habits (good and bad) can a principal hope to travel toward a workable vision.

"School culture is the product of a succession of diverse and ever-changing social relationships among those who work and live in the school," write Stephen Stolp and Stuart Smith in *School Culture and Climate: The Role of the Leader*, published by the Oregon School Study Council in 1994. "Does the school's faculty have a history of conflict or collaboration? Why do teachers, who once had a habit of staying at the school until 5 p.m., now, with a new principal in the building, quickly head for the parking lot after the last bell has rung? To ask these types of questions—in pursuit of the roots of conflict or a lost work ethic—is to engage in cultural analysis."

To understand a school's culture, the principal needs to first spend time observing and listening—in other words, sopping up and mulling over the countless details that together form this one-of-a-kind place. "Then and only then," Stolp and Smith counsel, "a principal can begin to approach change by empowering staff and negotiating a shared culture of meaning." The researchers offer the following practical suggestions for changing school culture:

- Establish a shared vision. "Make vision-building a collective exercise," recommends Michael Fullan, Dean of Education at the University of Toronto. By giving a variety of people the opportunity to help create the vision, students and staff share some responsibility for culture building, Fullan notes.

- Reconceptualize leadership roles. The traditional view of a leader as an authoritarian decisionmaker is a "dead concept," say Stolp and Smith. "True," they note, "leaders must at times make unpopular and difficult decisions, but they should do so in a collaborative process." They cite Peter Senge, Director of the Center for Organizational Learning at MIT and author of *The Fifth Discipline*, who offers a three-fold model for rethinking leadership roles. In this model, the leader is designer, teacher, and steward. "The most important prerequisite is a willingness to relinquish some authority and control of the administrative and creative process," Stolp and Smith stress.
- Think systemically. "In simplistic terms, systems theory derives from focusing less on particulars and more on the whole," the researchers write. "In a school culture, systems thinking might include concentrating less on day-to-day events and more on underlying trends and forces of change." When administrators think of the system as an interlocking unit, they shift their focus away from this nut or that bolt to the fluidity or friction of the machine as a whole—from the "particular components of organizational management to the underlying cultural relationships," in the researchers' words. "Changing school culture may require modifications of particular components of the school," they say, "but the outcome will not be successful without a more holistic focus."
- Make full use of the principal's authority and leadership. To the question, Can the principal make a difference? researchers say, Yes, definitely. Fred Hechinger, who wrote the foreword to ***Effective Principal, Effective School Reform*** by James Lipham (1981) said: "I have never seen a good school with a poor principal or a poor school with a good principal. I have seen unsuccessful

Resources on School Leadership

Some of the most readable resources in education research deal with the topic of educational leadership. Here are a few highlights:

ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management

Located at the University of Oregon in Eugene, the clearinghouse offers a wealth of resources for administrators. Its Web site at http://ERIC/uoregon.edu provides easy access to tens of thousands of abstracts, ERIC Digests, articles, books, papers, and research summaries on all aspects of the governance, leadership, administration, and structure of all kinds of schools. The site also offers links to an Internet discussion group for K-12 administrators and to other organizations of interest to policymakers, administrators, researchers, and other educators. And a "trends and issues" department provides timely information on hot topics such as school choice, finance, law, and safety.

A perennial bestseller from the clearinghouse is *School Leadership: Handbook for Excellence*, edited by Stuart Smith and Philip Piele. Now in its third edition, the book is a gold mine of research findings on everything from leadership styles to shared decisionmaking. Calling the book "highly readable," Edwin Bridges of Stanford University says it provides "numerous examples of what a theory or a concept looks like in actual practice" and offers "suggestions for translating theory into practice."

For ordering information, visit the clearinghouse Web site or call 1-800-438-8841.

Jossey Bass Publishers and AASA

The Jossey-Bass Education Series offers a number of publications on school leadership and organization. One engaging book, *Shaping School Culture: The Heart of Leadership* by Terrence Deal and Kent Peterson, describes the critical elements of culture—the purposes, traditions, norms, and values that "guide and glue" the school community—and show how a positive culture can make school reforms work. Anecdotes from real schools bring the concepts to life.

Another recent title in the series is *Making Sense as a School Leader: Persisting Questions, Creative Opportunities*. This brief but enlightening book by Richard Ackerman, Gordon Donaldson Jr., and Rebecca van der Bogert shares "some of the sense" that practicing principals have made of their own complex work. Real-life case examples of typical leadership dilemmas provide valuable insight into how school leaders handle tough decisions.

For ordering information, call 1-800-956-7739 or visit the Jossey-Bass Web site at www.josseybass.com. These two titles, along with dozens of additional resources on school leadership, are also available through the American Association of School Administrators. Call AASA at 1-888-PUB-AASA or visit the Web site at www.aasa.org.

schools turned into successful ones and, regrettably, outstanding schools slide rapidly into decline. In each case, the rise or fall could readily be traced to the quality of the principal." Martin Maehr and Stephanie Parker in a 1993 article in *Phi Delta Kappan* write: "Leaders are not simply the captives of culture. They can and do affect it."

Leaders who embrace open inquiry, the sharing of problems and solutions, and collective responsibility will foster creativity, resourcefulness, and collaboration in the work of staff and the learning of children

—Richard Ackerman, Gordon Donaldson Jr., and Rebecca van der Bogert, *Making Sense as a School Leader: Persisting Questions, Creative Opportunities*

LISTEN, AND LISTEN SOME MORE

In seeking to define the good principal, it's useful to first describe the "bad" principal—that is, to pinpoint which qualities are undesirable in school leaders. Apparently, there's no shortage of potential data. Plenty of principals—as many as one-third—get fired, according to Clete Bulach, Winston Pickett, and Diana Booth. The three researchers pulled together some findings on common blunders for a 1998 ERIC Digest, *Mistakes Educational Leaders Make*. One study found 15 categories of mistakes, including, among others, lack of vision, avoidance of conflict, lack of knowledge about instruction and curriculum, a control orientation, lack of ethics or character, inconsistency, showing favoritism, and failure to hold staff accountable. At the very top of the list were "poor human-relations skills" and "poor interpersonal-communication skills"—two areas that are tightly entwined and wrap around just about everything else that happens in the building. Behaviors falling under these two problems include an uncaring attitude, lack of trust, failure to circulate with staff, staying distant, not calling teachers by name, failure to delegate, failure to give feedback, and failure to listen.

Keeping these gaffs in mind, now flip the question, and ask, What does a good principal look like? The answer, it turns out, is almost a mirror image of the "most common mistakes" list above. Sifting through a decade of research, *Education Week's* Keller pulls together eight traits or behaviors that add up to effective school leadership. A good principal:

1. Recognizes teaching and learning as the main business of a school
2. Communicates the school's mission clearly and consistently to staff members, parents, and students
3. Fosters standards for teaching and learning that are high and attainable
4. Provides clear goals and monitors the progress of students toward meeting them
5. Spends time in classrooms and listening to teachers
6. Promotes an atmosphere of trust and sharing
7. Builds a good staff and makes professional development a top concern
8. Does not tolerate bad teachers

The two related activities in item 5 above—spending time in classrooms and listening to teachers—pop up again and again in recent writings about school leadership. Together, they encapsulate the collaborative (and caring) nature of school leadership today. Scholars agree that unless a principal is fully connected to the people and instructional programs that form the heart of any schoolhouse, he cannot be an effective agent for change. Karen Seashore Lewis, a professor at the University of Minnesota—Twin Cities, found that "good principals spent time not so much on the formal apparatus of a reform agenda, but simply listening to teachers," Keller reports. Lashway and colleagues, writing in *School Leadership*, cite a number of findings in this vein. For example, Shirley Hord and Gene Hall found that principals who were most actively involved with teachers were the most effective in facilitating instructional improvement. "One result is high visibility," Lashway writes. "Involved principals walk the hallways and poke their noses in classrooms rather than sequestering themselves in their office." Richard Gorton and Kenneth McIntyre found that "effective principals listen to students, community, and staff." Arthur Blumberg says, "Every time I asked an administrator what was most important for him or her to be able to do well, the response was, 'Listening.'"

Joseph Murphy, a professor at Vanderbilt University, sums up the changing landscape of school leadership this way: "Principals are learning to lead not from the apex but from the center of a network of deep relationships with teachers."

In Seattle, Principal Testa-Cross is knitting together just that kind of network. When she came to John Hay Elementary four years ago, she found a strong faculty but little cohesion: No unifying idea guided them; no shared goal steered them. Quickly sensing the void, the new principal pulled together 75 staff, parents, and community members for a nine-month vision quest. After countless committee meetings and conversations, the group arrived at five goals. Testa-Cross (convinced that voluminous vision statements disappear as fast as wet snowflakes on sloshy pavement) compressed the goals into a pithy phrase—what she calls a "sound bite"—that everyone could remember and recite: Personal success, public stewardship, and a pathway to the stars for *every* student.

This "living vision," as Testa-Cross calls it, is being carried forward by parents and a leadership team of seven veteran teachers (selected by staff) and herself. "For a couple of years," she says, "I was really perplexed about what to do with these teachers who are so terrific. I felt I had nothing to offer them—they're masters. Then I realized that my job with them was to nurture leadership, because they had something to give others."

John Hay Elementary, which has seen test scores rise and enrollment climb for several years, is a testament to the power of shared leadership and collaborative decisionmaking.

"The critical element of great leadership is that you can take a vision globally," Testa-Cross says. "You encourage people in a personal way to add value to that vision. You respect and appreciate that contribution so that it's constantly growing and changing and new people are coming on board all the time with great ideas." ■

SO FAR, AND YET SO NEAR

n the waning weeks of 1999, four writers set out from Portland by air and by land to the far reaches of the Northwest. Their mission: Discover what a great elementary-school principal looks like in action. Suzie Boss traveled to a busy ferry port in Puget Sound. Patrick Collins ventured to the mountain-rimmed Mat-Su Valley outside Anchorage. Catherine Paglin visited a Victorian town in the shadow of the Siskiyous. And Judy Blankenship spent several days in the arid Boise River Valley.

As the stories arrived at the Lab one after another, the editors were increasingly struck by their likeness. Huge distances and wild landscapes separate the four school leaders featured here. Yet they run their schools in startlingly similar ways.

Our profiles of the National Distinguished Principals from Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington reveal 10 themes that echo across the miles. Selected for top honors by the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the U.S. Department of Education, these outstanding principals:

1. Keep their doors wide open
2. Spend much of their time among students and staff
3. Challenge and support teachers
4. Share decisionmaking with staff
5. Build team spirit among staff
6. Actively engage parents in the school
7. Hold high expectations for all students
8. Seek innovation and research-based strategies
9. Keep children always at the center
10. Exhibit great personal warmth and caring

Together, these stories tell, in a very human way, the very human business of leading a school toward excellence.

Bob Goerke, Jacksonville, Oregon

Debbie Toy, [illegible]

Chris Borgen, [illegible]

David N[illegible]

COMPASSIONATE LEADERSHIP

Debbie Toy has created a "family feeling" that binds her school community together.

Story and photos by JUDY BLANKENSHIP

BOISE, Idaho— [illegible]

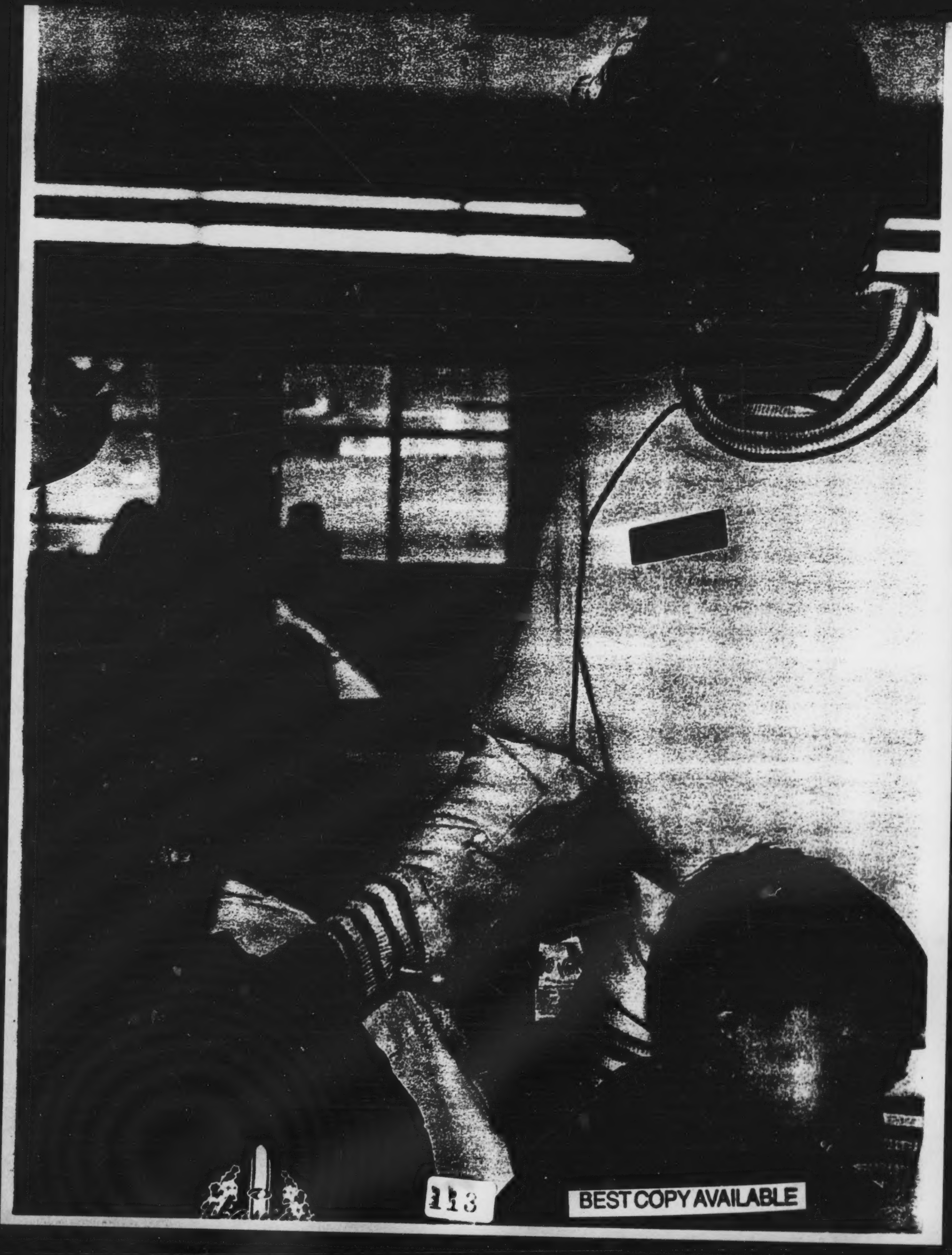
While the boys wait, Debbie Toy, Trail Wind's Principal and Idaho's National Distinguished Principal for 1999, is doing something she rarely does: sitting in her office behind a closed door. She's meeting with an Idaho Health and Welfare caseworker, the school nurse, and the school counselor, discussing a student who, along with other family members, was severely burned two years ago when the tent they were living in caught fire. The child is now struggling with serious behavior problems at school.

Toy picks up the phone and buzzes her secretary. "We'll be meeting a while longer," she says. "Take the boys to the cafeteria for an early lunch and I'll find them when I'm finished." She turns back to the meeting.

n animated 50-year-old with frosted hair, an infectious smile, and intense brown eyes that pay close attention to whoever is talking, Toy has devoted almost three decades to the Boise school system. When she went back to the University of Idaho in 1984 for her principal's certificate, she had spent 16 years in the classroom. She felt she needed a new challenge. Her years teaching had taught her how critical the principal's role is in a school, she says.

had some good role modeling (by other principals), but I also saw what happens when a principal becomes a closed door, not visible, not out there and a part of what's happening in the building."

Three years ago, Toy was assigned to Trail Wind, a new school under construction in Columbia Village, a vast housing development that stretches for miles into the dry plains east of Boise. When Trail Wind opened its doors to 550 students in September 1997, it was



THE NEW PRINCIPAL

already too small for the rapidly growing community. The school has reached capacity this year, and the addition of a new wing is planned for next year to accommodate an expected enrollment of 750. Toy says this should be the limit of any elementary school.

"Debbie was my principal of choice to take on Trail Wind School," says Jim Reed, Area Director and Toy's boss at the district. "Her greatest strength is that she was a good teacher and she can't understand why all others aren't good teachers. Debbie has the ability to move people up a notch, maybe even above their level of competence. She's a model principal and a trainer for others. I wish we had more like her."

The closed-door meeting finished, Toy escorts the three waiting boys to the conference room across the hall. She directs them to sit down around her at the large table. With pencil poised above a fat, three-ring binder, she says, "OK boys, tell me what happened."

What follows is a confused story that involves recess, the word "stupid," a race to line up, a shoving match, a step on a foot, and a punch. Toy listens carefully, ignoring the Rashomon-like tangle of conflicting stories to break in with positive observations like "so far so good," and "good choice," and

COLD
Coca-Cola

to ask, "What are safe things to do when you're angry?"

Toy reminds the boys of the Trail Wind mantra—"be caring, cooperative, and considerate"—and guides them through the choices they will make when an incident like this happens again. She shakes hands with the boys, sends the two smaller ones back to their classrooms, and escorts the larger boy, Jeremy (students' names have been changed), who has a history of anger-management problems, to her office. Toy calls his mother, explains what happened, and reassures her that everything is under control. She reminds the mother how important it is that Jeremy take his medication, and suggests that he discuss this incident with his counselor. She hands the phone to Jeremy, who talks softly to his mom for a few minutes.

"You have to use these teachable moments," says Toy after she has sent the child back to his classroom and made a second call to the mother of the boy with the bump on his head.

Since arriving at her office at 6:45 this Monday morning, she has met face-to-face with a child protection worker, the school counselor and nurse, three teachers, and three students. She has talked by phone to two parents. In between, she has called the district PR person about submitting a fourth-grader's poem to the monthly newsletter, accepted written apologies from two boys who stole balloons from a classroom, called the custodian about replacing a hinge, and agreed to an interview with a reporter from the Boise State University newspaper.

And it's only 11:30.

Now she gathers up a notebook and pen and strides down the hall for a classroom observation.

NEW SCHOOL, NEW PROGRAMS

Beginning with the tabula rasa of a new school was a particularly satisfying challenge for Toy, after principalships at two other schools. She hand-picked a dynamic team of talented, experienced staff and enthusiastic new recruits. All share her credo: Children come first.

"The emotional, psychological, and educational needs of children are not the same as they were 50 years ago, so why are we using the same school structure?" asks Toy. "We must create new ways to teach children if we're all in agreement they have changed."

One important structural idea Toy and her team implemented at Trail Wind is what they call the Accelerated Learning Center (ALC). It's designed to serve all special-needs students—low readers, learning disabled, gifted—plus those "in-between" who don't quite make the test scores that designate them as special-needs kids.

"Kids uniformly hate to be labeled," says Toy, "whether gifted or challenged. So what we did here was take away all labeling of children, teachers, and spaces. We don't call anyone a special-ed teacher, or reading specialist, or gifted-and-talented teacher, although they do have training in these areas. Instead we have, simply, ALC educators, and each gets to work with a range of children, from challenged to gifted. We put the teachers and three assistants in one big room, with their six desks jammed together in the middle, where everyone can talk, plan, and collaborate." Portable walls divide the room into activity areas.

At the request of a classroom teacher, or as indicated by test scores, any Trail Wind student can receive individualized remediation or enrichment. This year, 360 out of 655 students have been served by the ALC. "For the teachers, their days get filled with a variety of students and teaching experiences, which keeps things interesting," says Toy. "My special-ed teacher said she feels she's died and gone to heaven. She's never felt so loved."

The ALC team also serves the collective needs of Trail Wind. Last year the team analyzed schoolwide test scores and targeted first-grade reading as an area of concern. A reading program was designed to support the entire first grade, and test scores rose dramatically.

Initiated as a pilot program three years ago, the ALC is now a regular part of life at Trail Wind. "This has become such a positive place," says Laurie Wolf, (non-labeled) reading specialist, "that students stand outside the door and ask, 'When is it our turn to come in?'"

1:30 p.m. The school secretary, Peggy Mobberley, reminds Toy that it's time to interview the first of several candidates for the custodian's job. A hesitant, middle-aged man comes into Toy's homey office and settles onto the edge of an upholstered chair.

"As head custodian, what would be your vision for Trail Wind School?" Toy startles the applicant with her question. After a long moment staring at the floor, he looks up with a hopeful answer: "To keep it clean?"

Attention to every detail of her building is a Toy trademark. She has her hand in everything, from the posters and art prints in the hallways, to the baffles being installed in the lunchroom to reduce noise, to the care she takes in hiring a custodian with a "vision." Toy knows that the physical environment of a school is key to a positive and peaceful learning climate.

"For some of the 27 percent of our children who come from trailer park families, or live in the back of trucks and don't have homes, this is their home and they take pride in it. In three years, we've had two incidents of vandalism," Toy says.

Students at Trail Wind have other reasons to feel proud of their school. Beyond the double doors at the end of the central hallway, one can see the winter contours of an outdoor classroom. When it was suggested by a parent who had seen similar classrooms in Europe, Toy and her team enthusiastically embraced the idea of creating a living laboratory to teach kids about science and environment.

The project is a study in community involvement. Local partners such as Micron Technology, Barber Hills Nursery, and Boise State University helped design and plan the project. The developers of the ever-expanding Columbia Village donated soil from construction sites and large landscape rocks. The PTA provided funds to retool the school sprinkler system to route water to the site, and students earned enough money through a "math-a-thon" to fence the area and buy trees, shrubs, and plants.

Still a work in progress, the one-third acre project will include six raised beds for vegetable gardens —one for each grade—an orchard, wetland area with a small pond, weather station, bird-watching area, a desert area, and a small amphitheater.

"Debbie has tremendous skills for bringing in outside resources," says school counselor Judy Harper, who initiated Toy's nomination as principal of the year. "I see her as a natural leader who enhances everything around her to make it work for the better good."

2 p.m. "We have a positive, we have a positive!" announces Mobberley, coming into the resource room where Toy is chatting with a parent volunteer. "And it's Jennie!"

"Oh my gosh," says Toy, rushing down the hall toward her office, explaining in a low voice that Jennie is the first-grader who was the subject of the meeting with Health and Welfare the day before. "We've almost never had an opportunity to praise her before."

"Jennie, what have you got there?" Toy squats down to talk to the child. Her teacher stands proudly behind her.

"I wrote an essay, Mrs. Toy. It's about Christmas."

"Oh, let me read it. Look how well you've written in cursive! You must show this to your mom and dad."

"It's my daddy who needs to learn his cursive letters," Jennie remarks as her teacher leads her away.

Toy's biggest challenge as an educator is keeping parents tied to their children. "No matter how good your school, or how great your staff," she says, "if children don't have a sense of love and belonging at home, they are not as ready to learn when they come to school."

As a parent and stepparent (Toy has two grown children from her first marriage and two younger stepchildren from her current marriage), Toy has made parental involvement her crusade.

"I think in the past we parents did a better job of making sure that our children's basic needs were met," she says. "Now we're seeing the results of generations of poor parenting as we deal with parents whose own parents did not do a good job. So we as educators are having to put a lot of extra energy into bringing children up to where they are able and ready to learn."

Educating parents on their rights and responsibilities is the holy grail of Toy's crusade. "She wants parents to have the best of everything the school has to offer," says Harper, the school counselor, "and she wants them involved in the process." Through the PTA, Toy invites psychologists and school counselor trainees from Boise State University to meet monthly with parents and share parenting practices that make a difference as children mature.

A parent resource library has been established within the children's library at Trail Wind, and any parent in the neighborhood can check out books. *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk* and *Parents' Book About Divorce* have flown off the shelves. Says Toy: "We've asked parents to write little reviews of the books they've read so we can include them in the newsletter that goes home with every child on Fridays. Parents are more apt to listen to other parents than to school officials."

Toy lays the groundwork for a parent meeting like a skilled diplomat. Briefing two teachers and an aide about a child who probably should not be at Trail Wind, she begins a recent meeting by stating her unequivocal support for her staff. The child, a second-grader with learning disabilities, was doing well in a self-contained program at another school before his parents insisted he be transferred to Trail Wind to be with his siblings. The parents are unhappy with the services the school is providing. Toy outlines for her staff the school's legal position, and suggests responses to anticipated questions and complaints.

"With some parents," Toy concludes, "we must emphasize the hope and not the reality."

3 p.m. Toy finds a moment to phone a teacher who recently had surgery. "Hello Nina. This is Debbie—Mother Toy—calling to see how you're doing. We miss you, but the sub is doing a good job and all your kids are great. You're coming to the Christmas party? Awesome! I don't think you should drive yet. Shall I pick you up?"

When Toy calls herself a "cheerleader" for her staff, her metaphor is apt, although "coach" might be closer to the truth. She is an outstanding team builder who surrounds herself with positive, energetic people and then gives them the close attention they need to maintain a collective focus. "I am not a power person," she says. "My style is more nurturing. I feel my critical role, if there's any one thing I can do, is to be in tune with my teachers, to be always aware of where their stress is. I am there to be a sounding board and a positive thinker."

Staff solidarity is palpable at Trail Wind. In the easy camaraderie of the teachers' lunchroom, an informal survey on Toy's leadership qualities brings comments like, "she sets a tone of cohesiveness ... a family feeling," "her leadership is compassionate," and, "Debbie's passion is contagious."

Toy invites schoolwide communication with her quarterly principal's "chat sessions," when Trail Wind staff are given the opportunity to share what's going well, and what's not. "She makes it safe to share concerns," says Paula Bell, Vice Principal, "and works to deal with problems."

Continues Bell: "I have been at five or six elementary schools in my career, and I've never been at a school like Trail Wind. The ambiance here is unique, and I think it's because of Debbie. You certainly feel that she's driving the ship, but she also empowers people to take the initiative. And the sky's the limit in terms of innovative, educational efforts. Last year a fifth-grade teacher was interested in Legos, so with the help of other staff she wrote a successful grant to the Lego Corporation for $38,000. Now every classroom has a Lego Lab."

Among the many letters written in support of Debbie Toy's nomination for Distinguished Principal was one from Janet Orndorff, Boise School District Trustee, who wrote: "The Boise School District has many excellent principals. Debbie Toy is a shining star among them."

4:30 p.m. Toy prepares to leave for the day. She's heading home to start baking for a holiday lunch she's hosting for 20 PTA board and committee members.

"My husband and my mother laughed when they heard," she says. "I'm no cook—just a Campbell Soup kind of person. I asked my mother to help me out, but she said it was time I learned to cook now that I was 50. She gave me recipes, and I went to the store and bought things I've never seen before. I'm going to cook that lunch!" ■

Photojournalist Judy Blankenship has been awarded a teaching and research Fulbright Award to work in Ecuador on a documentary project for a year.

DRIVEN BY DATA

Chris Borgen relies on research and collaborative leadership to "unlock learning" for kids.

Story and photos by SUZIE BOSS

ANACORTES, Washington— For thousands of visitors each year, Anacortes is a way station. At the northern end of Puget Sound, a short bridge away from the mainland, land gives way to water on all sides. Street traffic ebbs and flows with the ferry schedules. Vacationers who pour through this island community en route to the San Juans or Victoria, B.C., might linger long enough notice the folksy murals painted on the historic downtown buildings or browse at the antique shops and art galleries. But few would guess that quaint Anacortes (pop. 13,900) is home to one of the most forward-looking schools in the country. For 500 students in kindergarten through sixth grade, Fidalgo Elementary is a way station to the future.

Throughout the past 14 years, Principal Chris Borgen has been helping his rural school steer a course toward academic excellence. Seafaring metaphors fall flat, however, in the presence of this soft-spoken school leader. Borgen is not one to bark orders or pull rank. He's more of a sweater guy than the spit-and-polish type. Indeed, he sees himself as more coach than captain. And like a good coach, he credits his entire staff for the many honors and awards on display inside the school's front doors: Exemplary School Award from the U.S. Department of Education, 1989; America's Best School Award from *Redbook* magazine, 1994; Schools for the 21st Century grant recipient, 1990-1995. Since last spring, when Borgen was named the National Distinguished Principal for the state of Washington, he's been instinctively deflecting the attention to his "hardworking, incredible staff."

Chuckling affectionately, his teachers, secretary, and other staff members acknowledge that their esteemed leader is probably embarrassed by all the fuss. "It's awkward for Chris to be in the spotlight like this," says one teacher who's known him since his first day on the job. "He's such a collaborator. He's not the type to grab all the glory for himself."

But when the conversation shifts to the school rather than its leader, Borgen is back on comfortable footing. This is the success story he knows well. What's more, he's made sure that every person in the building has had a hand in crafting it.

GETTING ACQUAINTED

When Borgen arrived at Fidalgo back in 1985, he was a relative newcomer to elementary education. Although he had spent a year as an assistant principal at a junior high school in Spanaway, Washington, he had devoted most of his career to teaching English and coaching basketball at Anacortes High School.

Betty Adams, longtime school secretary at Fidalgo, got the scoop on the new boss before he even arrived. "I was told that he was young and didn't know much about elementary schools. But I also heard that he was a nice person, a quality person, and he could learn."

nd learn he did. "I knew this was a good school before I arrived."

Borgen recalls. "It has a strong staff of teachers who have been together for quite a while. So I tried to work that to my advantage. I came in and said: I've got some things to learn. I hope you can help me. I'd like to live in your classrooms for a while and learn from you about elementary education."

Some of the veterans raised an eyebrow at first. "Here was this new kid on the block, barely 30, with all this youthful energy," recalls Sue Harrington, who retired last year after 28 years of teaching, all of it at Fidalgo. "But he turned out to be a breath of fresh air. I had been teaching for more than a decade by then. I was getting a little tired. He brought in new energy and ideas that probably helped me stay in teaching."

Nancy Bush, who spent 20 years at Fidalgo before retiring, still remembers how the new principal handed out balloons to staff members. "You could turn in your balloon for two hours of free time to schedule however you wanted—conferences or lesson planning or whatever—and he would cover our classrooms," she says. Although impressed by his eagerness, she waited and watched for a year before cashing in her balloon.

Meanwhile, teachers started noticing that kids were looking for any excuse to visit the new principal's office. Far from a punishment, a trip to see Principal Borgen was a chance to show off your best work and get a Gummy Bear as reward. From the start, Borgen has been sure to build on strengths rather than penalize shortcomings—whether he's working with students or staff.

Borgen also took time, as soon as he arrived at Fidalgo, to talk with each teacher individually. "I wanted to find out what they valued, and what they wished they could take care of better." Although he was proceeding by instinct—just getting acquainted—Borgen has since learned that what he was doing has a name and a place in academic circles. "It's a cultural audit, to use the research phrase, but I didn't know that at the time."

The new principal quickly detected that his teachers shared "a tremendous sense of ownership, which I think is still the hallmark of this school. There were some things we needed to work on, some systems that could work better. But those were minor."

Borgen also convinced his faculty to conduct a thorough self-study, using criteria defined by the school-effectiveness movement. Not only did the study give the school a baseline for future assessments, but it also helped break down a feeling of isolation. "It expanded our awareness of what other schools were doing, and gave us a chance to compare and contrast ourselves against what the research says we should be doing in effective schools," says Borgen. The survey, conducted by the local education service district, also yielded some candid critiques of the new boss. "That helped my development as a principal," he says.

Quickly earning a reputation as a lover of research, Borgen rallied his staff to take yet another collaborative step. Together, they wrote the mission statement that continues to drive the institution. "That has given us a vision of where we want to be. It's not just something for the wall," he says, although it still hangs in the school entryway.

BUILDING ON SUCCESS

During the 1980s, the U.S. Department of Education recognized outstanding schools with the National Exemplary School Awards (now known as Blue Ribbon Schools). Borgen saw the award not as a potential feather for his own cap, but as a worthy goal that would benefit Fidalgo's students. He took staff members to visit schools that had already won the award, to find out what they were doing well. Back at Fidalgo, they began talking about their own classroom practices and how they compared with what teachers at exemplary schools were doing. And those conversations led to more collaboration. A staff that had functioned well as a collection of individuals started coming together, visiting each other's classrooms, focusing on new ways to enhance student learning. They were on their way to becoming a true learning community.

In 1989, when Fidalgo won its own designation as a state and national exemplary school, the honors "let us know we were on the right track," Borgen says. "It was positive and reaffirming." But for the no-longer-so-new principal, this was no signal to rest. As he explains, "Our basic goal here has always been to raise student performance. We were ready to try something that would raise achievement across the board. Not a new math or reading curriculum, but something more basic. Something that would enhance the skills kids need to be successful."

Around the same time, then-Governor Booth Gardner unveiled his Schools for the 21st Century Project, which offered generous but competitive state grants, designed to encourage innovation in education. Schools could receive up to $100,000 annually for six years, if

THE NEW
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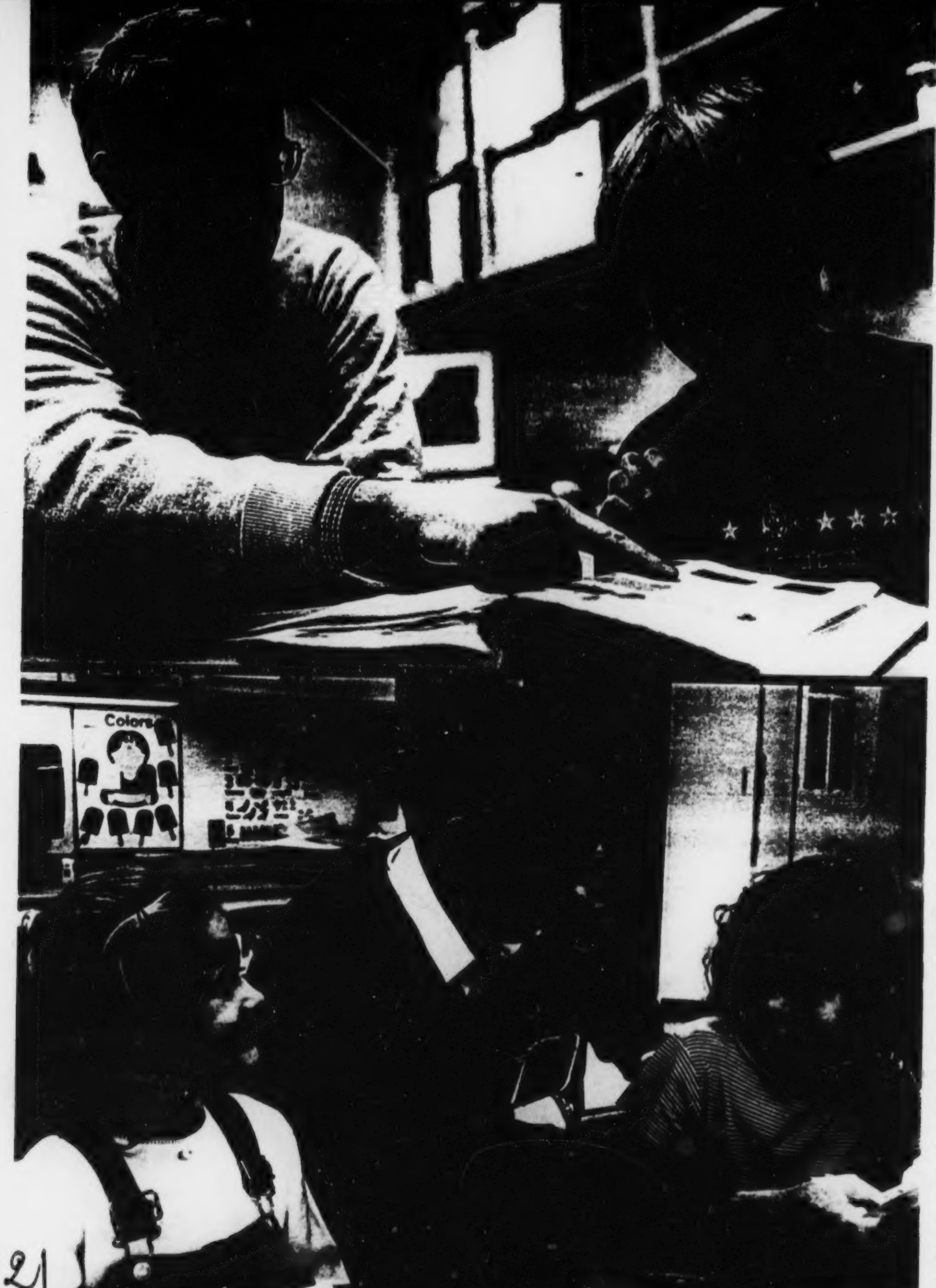


they could outline a plan for raising student achievement. But there was a catch, Borgen explains. "Everybody in the building—from custodians to classroom teachers to paraprofessionals—had to sign on."

Longtime teacher Chuck Starkovich admits to groaning when Borgen first described the grant process to the staff. "But Chris is so good at getting people to work together. He does it with ease, so we all feel like it's our idea. Somehow," Starkovich says, "he got us all to be cheerleaders."

Working as a team, the staff wrote a detailed grant proposal that hit pay dirt. In 1990, Fidalgo Elementary was selected as one of only seven recipients in the first round of the 21st Century funding.

Then the hard work really began.

The staff's goals were ambitious: to develop an integrated learning system that would raise student achievement, and also raise students' intellectual abilities—bump up their very IQ. "Our premise was, if we could improve intellectual skills, then the academic achievement would go up," Borgen explains. "If a kid is not able to get multiplication tables, or if a certain reading approach is not getting through, then maybe there's something we need to do even before we get to that step. We're an eclectic school. We've always used multiple approaches. And we've always felt it's our duty to find a key to unlock learning for each child." As the father of three, he is acutely aware of how different children can be. "This was a chance to expand our approaches to learning, in a data-driven way."

For the teaching staff, the grant meant not only extensive professional development, but also outreach for ideas far beyond Fidalgo Island. They all traveled to Japan for 10 days, for instance, to study a model called Structures of Intellect (SOI). Based on the theories of psychologist J.P. Guilford, the model essentially helps students learn how to learn. Teachers identify students' strengths and weaknesses and map their individual learning styles. Then, if a student has trouble understanding a concept, the teacher can tailor a lesson, using strengths to overcome weaknesses. "The idea is, all children are gifted. You have to find their gifts and use them," explains Bush, who continues to consult with the Fidalgo staff, even in retirement. "This gave us a tool to solve problems."

Back at home, the staff incorporated intelligence training into their own model, called "The Brain as the Curriculum." They tested new teaching approaches by coaching one another in the classroom. And they kept expanding the school's horizons—building an enduring sister-school relationship with a school in Tsu, Japan; hosting a yearlong exchange with a Japanese teacher; opening a free-latchkey program; offering classes in the Japanese language to the entire community. Some of the Fidalgo teachers eventually traveled to China and Japan to present workshops on intelligence training. And visitors from all over the world found their way to Anacortes to watch the Fidalgo staff and students in action.

As another part of the project, graduate-level courses in education were offered at Fidalgo by professors from Western Washington University. Every teacher on staff agreed to take the core classes, and several earned master's degrees in the theme of intelligence training and learning styles. They conducted action research, studying their own students.

"That shared learning experience was powerful for our school culture as well as the overall academic growth of our students," Borgen believes. Teacher Harrington found the classes worthwhile on many levels. "Here you were with these nice people—your fellow teachers—getting a chance to be students together. We encouraged each other, studied together, had potluck dinners. It was a nice way to add more glue."

By the time the grant ended in 1995, systemic change was evident: Average student achievement rose from the 70th percentile to the 85th percentile. Average student IQ increased by more than 16 points. On-task behavior improved. Disciplinary referrals plummeted. And teachers reported feeling more confident about trying new ways to help students succeed, less isolated in the classroom, and more tolerant of diverse learning styles.

Not surprisingly, turnover remains low among both students and staff at this highly effective school. Growth has been steady in recent years, due to a population increase and parents' choice to have their children attend Fidalgo. When it's time to hire a new teacher, Borgen knows exactly what he's looking for. "On the hiring committee, we always ask: 'Who's responsible for student growth?' Most people would give an answer that's a good one—they'd say it's parents, students, and the teacher. You might even hear the global one: 'It's the village.' But that's not what I'm looking for. That answer would probably get you screened out. I want a teacher who says: 'I am. I am responsible for student academic growth.' Because in this school, in this culture, we have people who feel that way. I agree that parental involvement is important, and we have strong parent involvement here. But I want a teacher who, when a kid is not getting it, is going to go the extra mile to find a way. Who literally bleeds when students are failing. That kind of person will get kids somewhere. These are teachers who are not going to quit. They'll keep looking for different methods to help a child succeed, until they get there. And when we hire people, we want them to match this culture."

SCANNING THE HORIZON

After 14 years as principal, Borgen is no longer "the new kid on the block." But even at 46, his hair now shot through with gray, he acknowledges that he's still learning on the job. He spends part of each year as an adjunct professor in school administration at Western Washington University, where he has a chance to keep up to date on research and trends. "It's humbling," he says, "how much there is to learn." But his intellectual curiosity reassures his staff that Borgen will be scanning the horizon for fresh ideas. "He keeps the vision in front of us," says teacher John Sayet, a 35-year veteran in the classroom. "We can count on Chris to keep asking, 'What is this? Does it work?'"

The biggest change in the principal's job has been the evolution in leadership style, from boss to facilitator, Borgen says. "For a principal to survive and be effective, the old authoritarian dynamic just doesn't work any longer. Some of the skills that our good counselors have fit in very well with this job. You need to be able to get people to analyze what they're doing, so they can look at their own practices and improve." Teacher Sherry Chavers praises Borgen for his ability "to draw out our strengths. He encourages us to take risks. In professional growth, he nudges us." And he pulls that "nudging" off with good humor, she says, willing to take jokes as well as dish them out.

Over the years, Borgen has been amazed by the number of good ideas that have come across his desk from community members, parents, and other educators. "These may all be good ideas, wonderful programs, but you can't do them all. It's easy to lose your school focus if you try every idea that comes along. As principal, you need to find a way to let people know you appreciate their ideas, but you also have to say: Our focus right now is this, and here's why."

Borgen's open-door policy means parents have an easy time getting his attention. Some tell him they want experiential, project-based education. Others favor workbooks, discipline, and a focus on the basics. "Can we provide a menu for all these people? If we don't," Borgen says, "we'll be losing our parents. Parents today realize they have options, from homeschooling to private schools to charter schools. And many of them are very sophisticated in their understanding."

If Fidalgo has held onto a lasting lesson from its years as a 21st Century School, it's that "there's no one way to get there," Borgen says. The school continues to offer multiage classes, traditional grade-level classes, teachers who loop from grade to grade with their students, and training designed to raise intelligence and build on multiple learning styles. Some teachers use a rigorous, standards-based approach while others take an experiential route to learning. Teacher Mark Perkins did his own research on the benefits of one-room schoolhouses, then convinced Borgen to let him teach a third- through sixth-grade classroom.

"There's room in the building for all these approaches," Borgen believes, "as long as we know specifically what we're about. And this school still focuses first on student academic performance."

While parents love the options that Fidalgo offers, counselor Jean Lungren suspects that few children are aware of the school's eclectic menu. "What they know is, there's a comfort level here. It's a secure place. They will be treated with respect here, and Chris is the one who models that for all of us."

Even a recent, major remodel of the building turned into an opportunity for collaboration. Borgen surveyed the entire staff for suggestions about design elements to help students thrive. The resulting building features tall windows to let natural light stream into the library and classrooms, and an air-filtering system to make breathing easier for students with allergies. Wide hallways include alcoves for displaying student projects, such as papier-mâché dinosaurs or a giant tree house stocked with library books. A technology center connects with the library, so that students can move seamlessly between research and writing. Tucked between classrooms are smaller "utility rooms" where students can receive individual attention or work in small groups, but remain under a teacher's supervision. A counselor's office sits right across from the main office, a visible symbol of the school's focus on the whole child. Even parents have their own PTA room, underlining their importance in the "Fidalgo Family."

Would it have been easier for Borgen to work with the architect by himself? No question. "Collective problem solving is a lot more time consuming," he admits. It also means giving up some of his authority. But by opening the discussion to all, he wound up with a building that came in under budget and is "owned" by the whole community. "Collaboratively, you get better answers. Most of all, you create a better culture for your school." ■

THE NEW PRINCIPAL

THE GOOD HUMOR MAN

Bob Goerke gets the best from students and staff with an artful blend of wit and wisdom.

Story and photos by CATHERINE PAGLIN

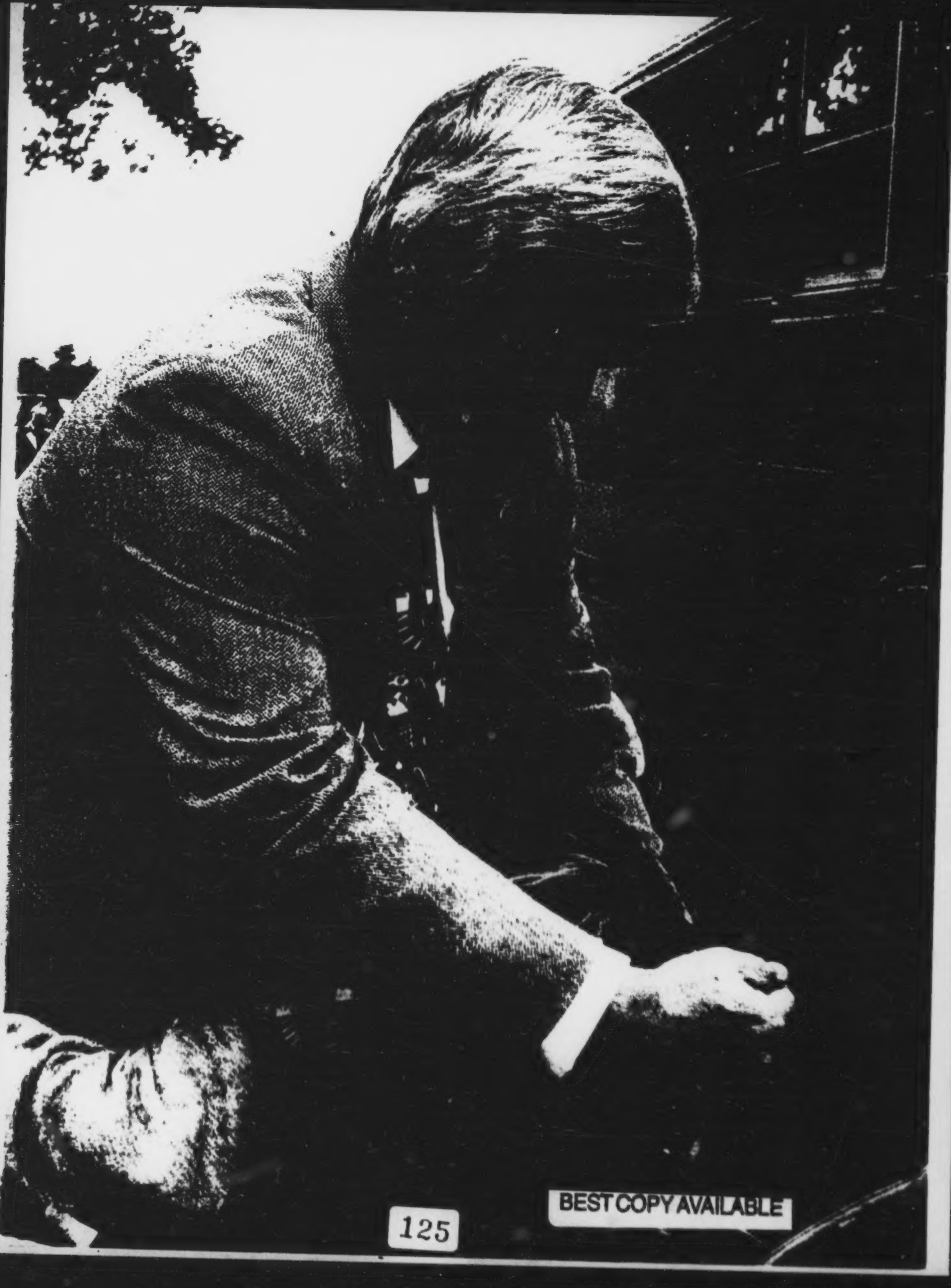
[illegible]

JACKSONVILLE, Oregon— Jacksonville Elementary looks nothing like the one-room schoolhouses from this town's proud past. Students don't sit at wooden desks dipping their pens into ink wells. No schoolmarm stands at the doorway each morning, clanging a bell and greeting pupils. But someone does wait for them every day without fail. When students jump off the buses and stream through the breezeway, their principal is there, raising his voice over the general din.

i, John. Good morning, guys. Hi, Stephanie. Good morning, Ben. Good morning, everybody. Are you feeling better? How's your grandma? Good morning, Michelle. Good morning, sweetheart."

Bob Goerke, Oregon's National Distinguished Principal for 1999, likens Jacksonville to Norman Rockwell's America. It's a place where people still know each other, and he does his part to keep it that way. His 400 students wouldn't understand what it takes to run a school building. They wouldn't be interested in the reams of educational research he reads. They wouldn't know or care that his work as chairman of the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission shapes licensure standards for every teacher in the state. What they do know is that he cares about them. He makes time for them every day—at the buses, on the playground, in the classroom. "He knows if they collect baseball cards, he knows if they're a skateboarder. He knows each child really, really well and knows each family," says sixth-grade teacher Elaine Reisinger.

hile upholding what is good in small-town values, Goerke (say GUR-kee) brings a forward-looking vision of education to a historic community that has undergone many changes. Jacksonville, now a tourist destination, boomed in the mid-19th century. It was a busy gold-mining town and center of trade for Southern Oregon. Money flowed and mansions rose. Then fortune's wheel turned: In 1883 the railroad bypassed Jacksonville for nearby Medford. With the train tracks went prosperity, leaving behind a collection of Victorian edi-



fices, souvenirs of the glory days. Until recently, the town—a National Historic Landmark since 1966—was home to a predominantly low-income population. "I got all my student loans forgiven because I was teaching at a poverty-stricken school," says Reisinger, who joined the staff 30 years ago.

Today, the Jacksonville area is booming again. Following the region's influx of retirees have come service and healthcare professionals, and now telecommuters, many from California. These newcomers bring new expectations. Though they like Jacksonville's small-town feeling they want big houses on big spreads just outside of town. And they want big-city services, such as a recently instituted nonstop flight from Medford to Los Angeles. They support the high-quality cultural offerings of Jacksonville's Peter Britt Music Festival and nearby Ashland's Oregon Shakespeare Festival. They support education and demand a lot from their schools.

"Part of what I need to be most concerned about as principal is meeting the high expectations of the community, seeing that their students achieve up to that," says Goerke. But when he arrived at Jacksonville School three years ago, achievement was lagging behind those expectations. Jacksonville was not one of the top-scoring schools in the Medford School District; in some grades and content areas, it was even scoring below the district average on state tests.

"Resting on your laurels is always a danger," says Goerke. "Everybody loved this school inside and out when I got here, but we weren't doing well." Particularly troubling was that in some cases scores of the "intact" groups—students who had always been at the school and should have benefitted from that consistency—were lower than those of the general school population. Goerke joked at a staff retreat that it looked as if "the longer you stay at Jacksonville School, the worse you do." Actually, he says of the intact scores: "It wasn't a chronic problem in that you couldn't point to it everywhere in every test. But it was a symptom of an issue, and that was a curriculum-articulation issue."

Instead of a well-articulated K-6 curriculum, Jacksonville had teachers operating what Goerke calls "educational franchises," each with his or her own pet projects and field trips. In addition, assemblies were often impromptu events, unrelated to curriculum. The result was gaps and overlaps in the system as a whole.

The school's complacency with this situation can be traced to old patterns that had become so ingrained over time, no one noticed. Goerke points to the pitfalls inherent in long-term principal-staff relationships—pitfalls that any school can tumble into when people stay put too long. "Elementary school principals work very closely with their staff. You have to build relationships with your staff, and you rely on those relationships. There is constant pressure to build positive relationships. Principals are going to slowly move toward keeping things positive, instead of pushing people out of the little envelope they're so comfortable in."

Over the course of his career, the 50-year-old Goerke has become adept at building and maintaining good relationships while still challenging staff to change and improve. In his 18 years as a principal, he has overseen improvements at four schools that span the spectrum of need. At one end of the spectrum was a rural, Title I building in northern Los Angeles County, with a 94 percent free-and-reduced-lunch population. At the other end was a suburban Medford school where only 7 percent of students were on the lunch program.

At Jacksonville, Goerke convinced the staff to give up pet projects, coordinate field trips, develop common instructional units. He encouraged joint planning, purchasing, and scheduling. He persuaded teachers to share ideas, materials, even students. Thanks to his sense of purpose, and the staff's hard work, Jacksonville now has a system of teams and meetings that facilitate communication between teachers at the same grade level, within each of the school's three wings (kindergarten though second grade, third and fourth, and fifth and sixth), and between wings. Goerke shifted his staff's use of a districtwide weekly early-release day. Before, teachers used the time as they wished, for general planning. Now, the time is dedicated to weekly wing meetings and monthly cross-wing meetings. A calendar committee, working a year in advance, put a stop to unscheduled assemblies and those unrelated to curriculum.

Goerke didn't tell his staff exactly how to make change. Instead, he gave them the professional latitude to work out a plan and manage the details. "At times it was a little frustrating," admits fifth-grade teacher Curt Shenk. "At times I thought, Bob you're the boss, make the decision. But at other times, looking back now, I take a lot more ownership of our accomplishments and our progress and successes. He's really enabled our staff to grow together."

"He kind of built on it each year," says third-grade teacher Cindy Schubert. "The first year he had us start working together at grade

THE
BEAR
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levels. The following year he developed the wing meeting. Then last year he really had us work on helping kids meet benchmarks—that means meeting with the grade levels ahead of you and behind you. So it's kind of evolved, but he's done it in a way that we had some ownership. It wasn't just a mandate, because that doesn't work real well. So I think everyone's bought into it."

The increased coordination and cooperation have created more learning opportunities for students. Teachers have begun doing some team teaching and ability grouping, particularly in the upper grades and particularly in math, moving students between classrooms and grade levels to meet individual needs and draw on individual strengths. "My fourth-grader goes to the other fourth grade for math," reports parent and PTO President Michelle Gordon. "In second grade, one of the teachers is real strong in science and the other is real strong in art, so they switch. There's a lot of team teaching that happens as opposed to before he was here."

Jacksonville is seeing the results of a more streamlined approach to curriculum. In 1999, third-grade math and reading scores were the highest in the district. And the gaps between the whole-school group and the intact group have closed.

Success in meeting benchmarks

in basic curriculum areas means the school can continue to provide the well-rounded education that parents expect and the staff believes in. While some schools in the district have abandoned music and art to focus on raising test scores, Jacksonville School begins its day with a music-appreciation program purchased by the Britt Festival, one of the school's business partners. A different composer is featured each week. During the first week in December, for instance, a William Byrd harpsichord melody trills out over the PA system. Kids learn about the composer, the piece, the instruments, the musical style.

After music appreciation, the school's intermediate students are in a music block, in addition to their twice-weekly general music classes. *"Come sing a song of countries far away, down south of the border, and ring in Christmas Day,"* sings the chorus, accompanied by a parent on the piano while the music teacher conducts. The band toots a lively rendition of "Up on the Housetop," while orchestral students review a score, chanting "A, E, D, D, E, rest, rest." Meanwhile, an artist-in-residence is teaching younger students about quilting. Each spring the school stages a musical in the Britt Theater tucked in the hills above town. Goerke is hoping to add a dramatic production in the fall. He'd like to continue adding art and music offerings, perhaps eventually centering the school's curriculum around the arts.

NO MORE BLACK SOCKS

Goerke's leadership style combines professionalism and high expectations with a frankness and humor appreciated by teachers and students alike. (See the sidebar for student comments.) Sometimes he opens the staff meeting with an exchange of funny stories about incidents at school. At other times his humor is deadpan and unexpected.

At a recent staff meeting, a serious young teacher is presenting site council recommendations. "To the best of my knowledge," he says, "we had 100 percent of the third-graders meet or exceed the benchmark in writing."

"Well, we can do better. Right?" says Goerke in a grim undertone.

Still fixed on his notes, the presenter continues earnestly with his review of the facts. A few seconds later laughter rolls across the room as the joke sinks in. "105 percent meeting benchmarks!" exclaims another teacher.

When Goerke expresses disagreement or discomfort, he does it in such a way that "you don't feel put down," says Reisinger.

Sixth-grade teacher Mike Yunkherr started his first year at Jacksonville attired mainly in shorts. Along with his shorts, he wore black socks—the only socks he owned. One day, Goerke, who prefers slacks and ties for male teachers, pulled the new staff member into his office. "He says, 'Mr. Yunkherr, your black socks are dorky,'" Yunkherr relates.

Yunkherr acknowledges he might have bristled at the comment had it come from someone else. But from Goerke, he viewed it as benign. "He would like me to be more professional—that's just his nature," he says. "He doesn't do it out of spite. He does it out of encouragement."

Goerke is attentive to staff-development issues far beyond attire. "He cares about improving the profession," says media specialist Anne Mitchell, who is working on an educational administration degree. "He has professional pride and goes through the effort to teach me. Not everybody will give you that time."

Fourth-grade teacher Jim Finnegan says, "I've learned about teaching from him." A veteran Oregon Shakespeare Festival actor who changed careers three years ago, Finnegan describes a math lesson that Goerke watched him teach. "I was asking questions and leading the students toward a particular solution," he recalls. "Every time I got another answer, I would say

KIDS

H

(Sarah, sixth-grader)

O

(Garen, sixth-grader)

I

(Cameron, sixth-grader)

H

(Jane, sixth-grader)

H

(Ben, third-grader)

I

(Stephanie, third-grader)

H

(Melissa, third-grader)

'No-o-o.'" Afterward, Goerke suggested that Finnegan respond more positively, saying something like, "That would be the answer if I were asking about the factors or the multiples." The idea was to make students feel good about their efforts and then redirect the questioning.

Goerke models an affirming approach to teaching in his interactions with staff. "Once he gives feedback or points out some area for growth, when you act on it he always makes a point of coming back and saying 'I see how well you're doing that,'" says Finnegan. "He's really good about giving positive feedback and then I realize how good that makes me feel and I try to do the same thing for my kids."

Goerke visits every classroom almost every morning. He sits and listens, talks to students and teachers, and checks for maintenance problems. Two or three times a year, he writes a note to each teacher, always containing positive observations. To a first-grade teacher, he wrote: *Janie, Looks as if you are off to another good start. Your classroom is always so well organized. Children are on task, and you make certain all students are paying attention when directions are given. Great job. Bob*

To a resource room teacher, he wrote: *Jeanne, I have been meaning to get you a note—but time has been getting away from me. I have been learning to appreciate you as a person, and as a teacher. I have also been learning to appreciate your students. They are neat kids—needy but neat. You have a nice way with children—calm, yet insistent. They must know you care about them. Bob*

These small gestures have a big impact. Observes Schubert: "I've had principals who've never been in the room unless there's some crisis, and they don't have a clue as to what's going on. He's in here just about every day when he's in the building. He knows the kids. He knows my teaching style. It makes a huge difference as to knowing how your building is functioning."

THE MOST NECESSARY THING

When Goerke enters a classroom, students light up as soon as they spot his white hair and ready smile. Some open their arms for hugs. He pats them on the shoulder, ruffles their hair, and asks about their work: "Is that a reindeer with sunglasses?"

"He comes in our class every day," says a third-grader named Jacob. "That's my favorite part of the day because we get to say hi to him. He gets to see how we're doing, and sometimes he'll talk to our teacher about what we might be doing next. Sometimes when he comes in and we're taking a spelling test, he asks how I'm doing and I let him look at my paper."

The love and respect Goerke shows to his students inspires a love of learning, says Reisinger. "It's so important because we're here for the kids. They feel their principal cares, their principal's their advocate. They don't see him as an authority figure. Yes, they respect him, but they also feel he's part of their team—and therefore they do better in school. Other things can be delegated. The kids and the relationship with the principal is Number One, because that sets the tone for the school."

The bond Goerke has forged with students speaks for both his managerial skills and his personal warmth. "He has the organization, the organizational plan, to limit unnecessary things and focus on the necessary things," says Reisinger, "and the most necessary thing is the child."

HUGS FOR THE ROAD

As the children scramble onto the idling buses, their principal is there to say good-bye. "Hi Kendra. Hi guys." He lifts one of the guys off the ground. "Come here, Katie." He gives her a hug.

"Bye, Mr. Goerke. Bye, Mr. Goerke," clamor the students.

"Bye. See you tomorrow. How come your backpack is open?" he says to one child, zipping the pack. To another, he cautions, "Don't forget."

"Don't forget what?" says the girl, who borrowed lunch money from him that day.

Inside the buses, the children crowd against the windows, laughing and pointing as Goerke scrawls "Merry Christmas" and sketches a snowman and Christmas tree on the dusty panes. A passing staff person reacts in mock horror.

"Oh my, don't do that," she says. "We had four students reported for writing on the windows."

Goerke ceases his handiwork as he runs out of prime canvas for images, saying, "That window's not dirty enough."

The buses rev their motors. The last few children run up for their hugs. The principal waves good-bye.

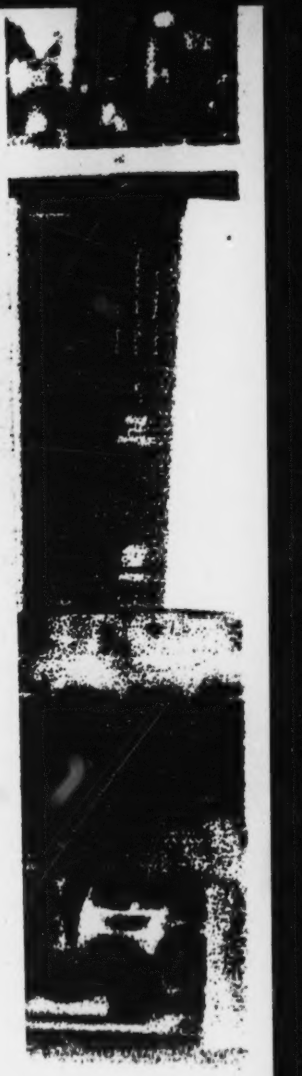
"Without this can you imagine how lousy the job would be?" says Goerke with both humor and feeling, as the last bus pulls out of the parking lot and silence falls. ■

THE NEW PRINCIPAL

THE PRINCIPAL KIDS LOVE TO HUG

Students are crazy about David Nufer, who has knit together a divided school with his warm, flexible style.

Story and photos by PATRICK COLLINS



WASILLA, Alaska— It's a sub-zero morning in early December. The last of the late-night stars twinkle and slowly fade overhead. The snow-covered glacial peaks that rise out of the Talkeetna and Chugach mountain ranges take center stage as crystallized silhouettes against the backdrop of an enormous, deep-blue Alaskan sky. Nestled between the mountain ranges in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley—Mat-Su to the locals—at the end of a gentle, almost poetically winding lane sits Finger Lake Elementary School. Nearly 400 students emerge from school buses and all manner of parent-driven vehicles and scurry into the building along the mercifully short walkway from the parking lot to the front door.

Some of the students are accompanied by a parent; many are alone. Nearly all are greeted, by name, by Principal David Nufer, whose attire this morning features a tie that, when squeezed gently at its tip, displays an illuminated Santa Claus.

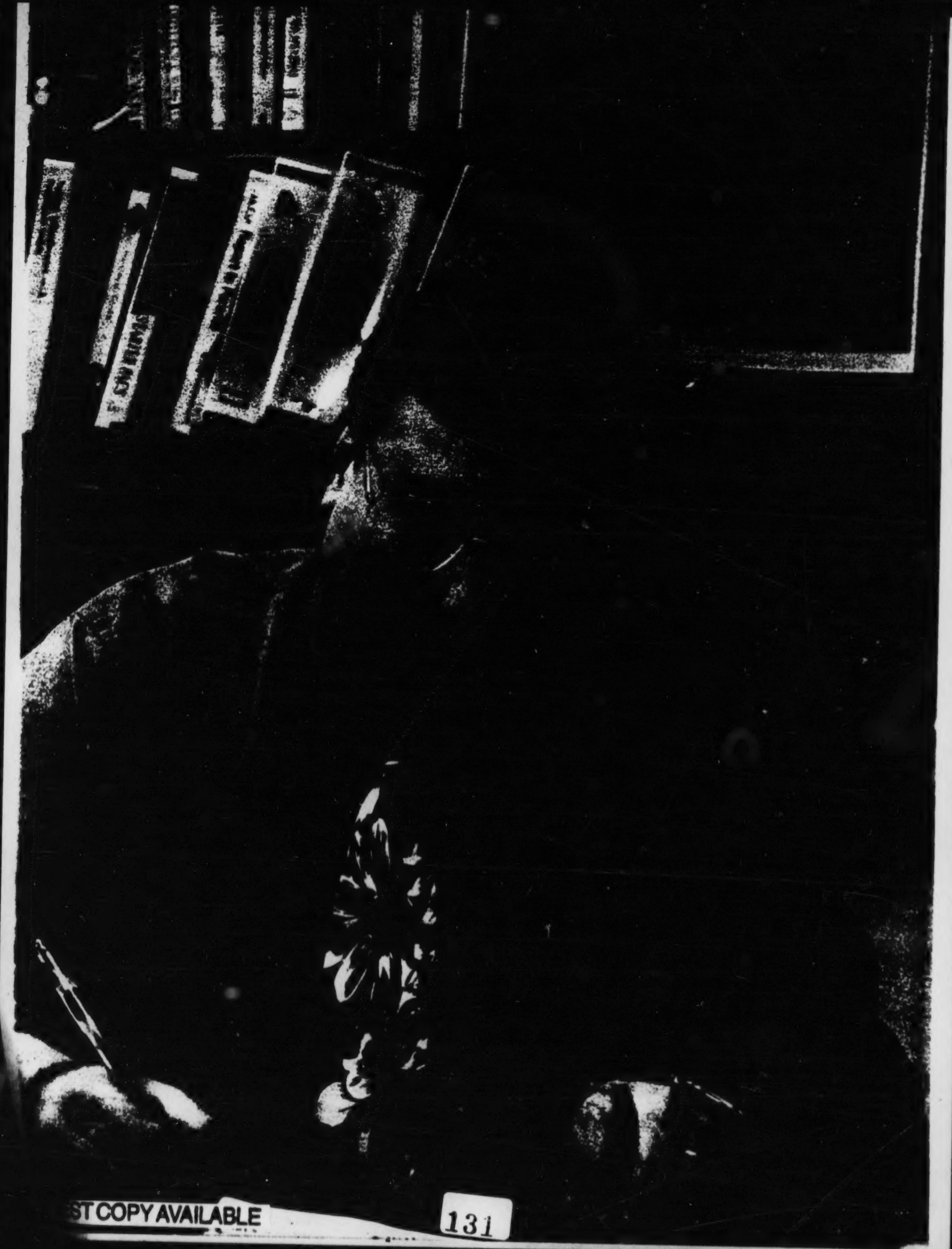
Nufer, Alaska's National Distinguished Principal for 1999, smashes to bits every stereotype of the stern, autocratic principal of eras gone by. His connection to the students, staff, and parents in his building is as profound, complex, and tangible as the Mat-Su Valley landscape.

While the feeling at Finger Lake is overwhelmingly positive, the school is not without its scars. Every year it has to yield to the reality of budgetary issues, which often require staff reduction. Being in one of the most tax-resistant states in the United States, the district has to contend with a heavy dose of anti-public-education sentiment, and, as Nufer describes it, "do a jig every year for funding." And, in the six years that Nufer has been principal, five Finger Lake students have died of causes ranging from leukemia to homicide. One of the students who died was the child of a Finger Lake teacher, which made the loss even more acute.

"These things make you who you are," Nufer says softly. "We pulled together and got through it."

Not that long ago, a trip to the principal's office meant you were in serious trouble. But at Finger Lake—in the midst of a school district the size of West Virginia and at least three times as rugged—you're likely to get a hug on your way out the door from the principal himself. Throughout the day, the 42-year-old Nufer hugs students in the hallways, the classrooms, and the lunchroom.

"You definitely get your hugs in



elementary school," says Nufer. "The hugging just happens naturally. Kids need to know that you love them."

And Nufer does, on so many levels, love the kids. Himself the father of two students at Finger Lake, one in first grade, the other in third, Nufer first caught the elementary education bug while doing fieldwork for an undergraduate course. A native of Vancouver, Washington, Nufer came to Alaska to direct Christian education for the Lutheran church in nearby Palmer. After substitute teaching for two years, he taught third, fourth, and fifth grades for five years.

In his six years at Finger Lake, Nufer has spearheaded shifts in the school's culture that are evident throughout the building. At the front entrance, for example, a donated collection of coats and gloves and other cold-weather accessories is free for the taking for families who are in need but too modest to ask for help. The building—Nufer's office, the library, the long and orderly hallways—is adorned with student artwork. The teachers wear relaxed faces and move gently among their students. And the students—the true barometers of a school's climate—are ecstatic whenever Nufer is nearby.

"The kids love and adore him," says Diana Anderson, who teaches a combination of third and fourth grades. "If we run into him in the hall, I'll definitely lose control of the class."

She's not complaining, though. Currently in her 11th year of teaching, Anderson has witnessed the contrast between Nufer and his predecessor, who took a more top-down approach to the principalship. Back then, the staff was deeply divided.

"Walking in here six years ago was like walking into the Grand Canyon," Nufer recalls. "One group was on one side, while the rest were on the other, and between the two was an enormous pit. That's where we started."

The main split, he says, was the perception that the principal rewarded favored teachers with coveted assignments. Nufer's solution was to turn over the scheduling process—483 students spread out among 50 staff, 21 classrooms, and three specialists—to the teachers. It turned out to be a good move. The teachers now feel valued and supported. Anderson says the changes Nufer has brought about at Finger Lake have played a major role in improving the quality of her teaching.

"We now have an atmosphere here that more closely approximates home and family, which of course allows for greater learning," she says. "I most definitely feel listened to, and Dave does what he can within his power to help. He doesn't even get mad at me, and I can be relentless when I'm advocating for my students."

Indeed, Anderson grew so attached to her second- and third-grade combo class last year that she couldn't bear to let them go, so she persuaded Nufer to allow her to stay with the group.

"The principalship is about the kids," Nufer. "I have strived to give the teachers the resources they need rather than putting ourselves in a box. I don't want to be bound by tradition."

One of the traditions Nufer has parted with is the dictum that educators must educate until they drop. Anderson says that working with Nufer has taught her the importance of a full and rich life outside of the classroom.

"The most important thing I've learned from him is that while it's important to put in your time to be a good teacher, there is more to life than teaching," she says. "He makes it OK to have other priorities. He models that by being involved in his church and the community, and by making time for his family. And, of course, the quality time we spend away from school only enriches our time here."

Diana Jobin-Vig, a specialist at Finger Lake for the past five years, says that Nufer's approach to the principalship allows her to be more effective at adapting the curriculum for children with special needs.

"You can tell he genuinely loves children," she says. "He goes out of his way to make this the best environment it can be, and he's very good at giving specialists the flexibility we need to do our jobs."

In addition to bringing teachers into the fold in more meaningful ways, Nufer has made parental involvement a priority. Since Nufer assumed the principalship at Finger Lake, parents have come to think of the school as much more than a collection of classrooms. More than 90 parents are members of the Finger Lake PTA. They attend and teach adult education classes at the school on topics ranging from anger management to accessing the Internet. They volunteer throughout the day, overseeing basketball and soccer before classes start, and tutoring one-on-one in math or reading long after the day's final bell.

"Parents want to get involved, and we make sure that's possible," says Nufer. "They care about their kids, and they feel welcome and needed here."

Ley Schliech, mother of two Finger Lake students and current president of the Finger Lake PTA, says that Nufer's style of leadership certainly makes her feel welcome—and needed.

"David is accommodating and supportive—a partner," she says. "He is willing to allow parents into the process."

Schliech, a trained health educator who has scheduled her life for maximum flexibility, says she admires the way Nufer carries out his duties.

"He's optimistic, he has a great sense of humor," she says. "He can ride out stuff, like personalities and differences of opinion that come and go. He doesn't personalize things. A principal's work is never simple—they have to be willing to take the heat and criticism from all different sides. I admire his willingness to do that."

Paddy Coan, a Finger Lake parent who has volunteered and worked as a paid staff member at the school for the past seven years, says Nufer brought enthusiasm and an ability to build partnerships to his role as principal—with magnificent results.

"He takes parental involvement above the classroom level," says Coan, who was PTA president at the time of Nufer's arrival. "I admire the way he took a look at what was going on before making major changes."

Probably the most notable change at Finger Lake is bringing teachers and parents onboard as full partners in planning and refining the school's two-track system of mixed and single-age classrooms. Parents and teachers can choose between the standard, single-grade classroom and classes that blend kindergarten with first grade, second with third, and fourth with fifth.

Coan admits she wasn't crazy about the idea at first, but that she warmed to it over time. "The multiage classrooms form pods of families that develop very strong bonds," she says. "It also enables the teachers to really get to know the parents."

"Walking in here six years ago was like walking into the Grand Canyon."

Although Coan was raised in nearby Anchorage, most of the families at Finger Lake aren't natives. The school, therefore, plays a much greater role than it would in a more urban setting. Senior citizens, for example, visit regularly to play cribbage to supplement math lessons. And the highly revered men and women who arrived in the Mat-Su Valley in the 1930s and now live at the Pioneer Home in nearby Palmer visit frequently. They help out in a variety of ways—tutoring in reading or math, or simply passing down the area's historical legacy via good, old-fashioned storytelling.

"Most people don't have an extended family here," Coan says. "The schools are like family and we develop very strong bonds. I think that collaboration is the one thing that gets us through."

And collaboration may as well be David Nufer's middle name. Since arriving at Finger Lake, Nufer has started a site management team that includes parents and staff. Instead of isolating itself, Finger Lake communicates its successes to the community through student-led conferences, portfolios, performance assessment, science fairs, math nights, family days, and school programs and performances. The entire Finger Lake community is playing a role in developing standards that will meet or beat those set forth by the state of Alaska.

But perhaps most important is Nufer's commitment to collaborating with the students—a collaboration that takes many forms. On Wednesdays, for example, Nufer visits a classroom, where he reads a story while the class eats lunch. At a few minutes before noon on this wintry Wednesday, he swings by the janitor's office to pop a tray of chocolate-chip cookies into an oven. While the cookies bake, he talks about how far Finger Lake has come since his arrival. He is characteristically modest about the role he's played in the school's turnaround, and equally optimistic about its future.

"There are so many openings down here at the elementary level, so many opportunities to intervene and nurture before it's a problem that can't be solved," Nufer says when explaining what keeps him motivated, and inspired. He pauses before opening the door to Anderson's classroom, where he will serve his just-baked cookies and read *Because a Little Boy Went Ka-Choo!* by Dr. Seuss while the children eat their lunches. "But we have to let kids drive the train. We have to put them first." ■

The Best Job

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the world

NASSP President John Lewis s [illegible]

Oregon native John Lewis brings three decades of school leadership to his new position as President of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). His nearly 30 years as a secondary principal and assistant principal in rural and suburban Oregon haven't dampened his enthusiasm for what he calls "the best job in the world." Now in his first year at the helm of Woodland Middle School north of Vancouver, Washington, Lewis recently talked with Northwest Education *Editor Lee Sherman about the challenges and rewards of the principalship.*

The Best Job In the World

NASSP President John Lewis

NORTHWEST EDUCATION: How did you find your way into the principalship?

John Lewis: I taught at the middle school in Estacada, Oregon, in the early '70s, and decided that I wanted to get into school administration. Never knowing when or where that opportunity might come about, I started taking classes to get certified. After six years in the middle school, I was going to move to the high school to teach health, and I had ordered some materials. One day, I walked into the high school principal's office and asked, "Did my books come in?" And he said, "By the way, one of the assistant principals just resigned and there's an opening. You ought to think about applying." I said, "OK, I will." I was an assistant principal there for two years, then an assistant principal at Oregon's Hillsboro High School for four years, and then became principal.

NW: Why did you want to move out of the classroom and into administration?

Lewis: While I was teaching, I was also coaching. I have always felt that there is a strong correlation between the coach's role and the principal's role. It used to be that all principals were ex-coaches. I think there is a reason for that. A lot of things that successful coaches do, successful administrators do. You're organized, you work with a diverse group of people. You have to have a focus and be able to withstand a little bit of pressure. I think there are a lot of skills that are transferable.

As a teacher, I would always look at things that were going on in schools and say, "If I were the person doing that, would I do it the same way? What would I change within the program?" I was given a lot of opportunity by the principals I worked with to experiment and try to put programs together. I really liked it.

I still consider myself a teacher. You're just doing it a little differently.

NW: What kinds of courses did you take to prepare for the principal's role?

Lewis: There is a whole administrative preparation program. You have about 35 hours of classes dealing with curriculum, finance, law, personnel.

NW: Principal training programs have taken heavy criticism from both practitioners and researchers. Critics say most preparation programs are not very practical—that the coursework doesn't translate very well into real life. Do you agree?

Lewis: The training I received fit well with the way schools were configured at that time and with the needs of students then. I think the criticism has come about because schools have changed significantly, and needs have changed significantly, but training programs have not changed significantly.

NW: Which changes in schools have created the greatest need for reforms in principal training?

Lewis: These days you have to be everything from a counselor to a psychologist to a pseudo-parent. You're getting a different population of kids—fetal alcohol kids, kids who are less likely to come from two-parent families. They've gone from mom to dad to grandmother to who knows what. The whole area of special education has mushroomed immensely. Everybody has a condition of some kind. We label it, have many meetings, and do a ton of paperwork to follow up.

I'm hopeful that the criticism you mentioned, which I think does exist, is being addressed by the universities. I think a lot of times, the people in those programs have not been in the school setting for a while. I don't want to generalize, but often the reason that they like to teach at the university level is because they are research-based. They may not always translate that research into practice effectively.

NW: Do you see a shortage of qualified candidates for the principalship?

Lewis: There is a huge shortage right now. It's not only in the Northwest, it's nationwide. In fact, it's international. I recently was part of an International Confederation of Principals study tour. Sitting around the table at a meeting in South Africa last March were people from Africa, the Far East, Europe, and Canada, and we were all talking the same language: There aren't enough math teachers, there aren't enough science teachers, technology is lacking. They are all having difficulty finding people to get into the principalship. One of the things that used to attract people was money. These days, you would never want to compare a teaching salary with an administrator's salary on an hourly basis because of the hours you put in. If you did, you'd cry. You may make more money than a teacher, but you work an extra 20 or 30 days a year. The compensation as a draw is not there.

Another issue for attracting secondary school principals is the night commitments. As a high school principal, you're probably going to have anywhere from 60 to 100 nights of activities during the school year. If you go to the FFA

(Future Farmers of America) banquet, the drama people are mad at you because you weren't at their play. Or you go to a school board meeting, and the girl's basketball team wants to know why you weren't at their game. I don't think the night commitments are as great at the elementary level, just because you don't have all the peripheral cocurricular types of activities. On a day-to-day basis, being a high school principal is the most difficult job in a school district.

NW: The best teachers often make the best principals. But the best teachers often don't want to leave the classroom because they like working with kids directly. Do you see talented teachers avoiding administration because they want the more immediate rewards of the classroom?

Lewis: I'm always looking for potentially good candidates to become administrators. They are your good teachers. When you talk to them, you hear exactly that: "I wouldn't want your job for the world."

NW: How do you answer that? Why should a really good teacher consider the principalship?

Lewis: You get a different set of rewards. In the classroom, you may see the light come on with one child because you've done something that struck a chord with them. Administrators, on the other hand, will occasionally get a call from a parent who says, "You're doing a good job." Or a teacher will come in and say, "I really appreciate the direction you're taking us. You let us work with you."

If you can create an atmosphere in a building where it's "us"—where everybody from the bus drivers to the custodians to the cooks to the secretaries to the teachers are all headed down the same path—you get a whole lot of pleasure and satisfaction just in working with your staff. It's a different set of satisfactions—always looking for new and better ideas. If you ever sit back and think you've arrived, you're wrong. It's a journey, not a destination.

NW: That "us" idea is a big focus in school administration these days—working collaboratively with your team, with your teachers. How do you do that effectively and still provide leadership?

Lewis: I try to be very open, very honest, very supportive of people who want to try innovative things—always combing the research and combing the ideas that are out there. I flood people with articles. I've got about six or seven teachers who work with me, and we brainstorm, we talk about it, and then we present it to everybody and let it sit. I feel like a farmer. You plant a lot of seeds and you keep sowing those seeds and they keep growing. Pretty soon it's time to harvest the good ones. When people have a direct investment in the decision, they will support it.

You have to have an open door. As you work with the staff, you have to value what they're doing and what they're saying. They want to be listened to. We all want to be listened to.

NW: What's the biggest mistake principals make?

Lewis: If you ever get complacent, somebody is going to pass you by. Once I saw a sign above a locker room door saying, "Every day you either get better or you get worse, but you don't stay the same." You can translate that into what you're doing with the school. If principals get complacent, that's it. When you're afraid to admit that you made a mistake, when you dig into a position, you lose support. Occasionally, an idea will fail. I don't think you can move ahead without failing. When you see the failure, you adjust and correct the situation.

Parents, by and large, are great people and they want the best for their kid. They know things aren't always going to be smooth at the school, and they can accept that if you're open and honest with them. But if you ever shut them out, they'll never come back a second time. If you make that one mistake, they tell 10 people. Now you have 10 people who are questioning and looking at the school negatively. Over time, that creates problems.

A big mistake principals make is not creating a climate within their school where communication is open. I hear teachers saying, "This principal never would tell us what was going on, would hide in their office"—all those kinds of things. I say to principals: "Get out of your office. Get to know your students; they need to know you." I enjoy being down at the cafeteria at lunchtime. I circulate, talking and saying hi to kids. That's the time when I counsel—lunchtime.

We had a magazine sale in the fall. The best magazine salesperson got to be principal for a day, and I was a student. I went to his classes. I showed up with baggy jeans and a big wool shirt, tennis shoes, a backpack. And I went slouching off down the hall.

NW: In the old days, the only kids who ever saw the principal were the kids who got in trouble.

Lewis: Yes. This is my first year in this school. The first kids whose names I got to know, of course, were those kids who were continually sent to the office for the first

month of school. It's easy to forget that that's only 5 percent. It can bog your day down.

NW: What are the important issues that the NASSP is dealing with right now?

Lewis: The principal shortage is something that we're struggling with. Principal accountability is another huge issue. When you're dealing with a national organization, you've got 50 different entities who look at it differently. For instance, in the state of Kentucky, all principals' contracts are tied to the superintendent's contract. If he gets fired, you have no job. Instant teamwork. Everybody's looking at test scores and what they can do to raise student achievement.

School violence is a huge issue. I was asked to speak on this topic at the Hawaii Principals Association in early December, and every state is struggling with that in a different way—with what you can and can't do. We've tried to set up a framework. We have a National Principal's Team—12 of us who are trained to respond to work with school districts. When the Littleton, Colorado, shooting occurred last year, we couldn't get in. Because of where it happened and the affluent area, they had their own resources and they really didn't want a national response team or a similar team from the federal government. They closed shop.

NW: They circled the wagons.

Lewis: They did. They took care of the thing themselves. We're now saying that really a national team isn't where we need to be. We need to be at the state level. We provided some trainings this summer and invited states to send people back. We're going to continue to provide some regional training and assist states in forming response teams to handle crises in the schools.

We're also looking to do more cooperative things with the national elementary association. I will have the opportunity to speak at the national elementary school principals meeting in March. I'm looking forward to talking with them about that and see what we can do together. We're all in this together.

NW: Can you talk about the differences between running an elementary school and running a secondary school?

Lewis: When you talk to your elementary colleagues, having a good day means they've received a lot of hugs. When you talk to a high school principal, a good day means no violence and minimal disruptive behavior. The younger the kids, the more chance you have to shape and influence them. To my friends who are thinking about going into administration, I say, "Being an elementary principal is where you have the opportunity to make the biggest difference." At that level, you have a great deal of opportunity to change kids and influence them. At the middle school level, it lessens a little bit, but you've still got that window. At the high school level, it's a tough battle. The train is already moving and you can't do a lot to derail it. High schools are the most difficult places to institute change.

NW: Why is that?

Lewis: There are many reasons, including tradition, a feeling of "We've always done it that way," and often resistance to change by staff. Some high school teachers see themselves mainly as curriculum specialists-content experts. They focus more on subject matter than on kids. But when you observe high school teachers, you'll notice that the most successful ones talk about kids more than they talk about curriculum. The real successful high school teachers are student magnets. They just draw kids to them. And it's because they care about the student as a person, they want to do what they can, plus they're great teachers.

NW: Do you find yourself juggling managerial kinds of tasks against instructional leadership?

Lewis: All the time—from the second you walk in in the morning until you go home at night. We're addressing this right now. There's a great new book from AASA (American Association of School Administrators) called *Total Leaders*. It's a synthesis of a lot of research on school leadership. We have an administrative study group, and once a week we'll get together and talk about a chapter. The book talks about the balancing that has to happen. You can't just be a manager, and you can't just be a visionary. You have to do both, especially in the smaller schools like this one, where I'm the only administrator in this building. If a student gets in trouble, I have to deal with him. You juggle that constantly.

Another very good book is called *Who Moved My Cheese?* In that book, "cheese" is what you have, what you're used to, your comfort zone. The book is about change and how we go about change. It's about 100 pages long, and it takes you an hour to read. We've used it as a staff development tool. In fact, Gerald Tirozzi, NASSP Executive Director, bought it for all our board members. We spent time at our board meetings discussing it. It's written by Ken Blanchard, one of the authors of *The One-Minute Manager*.

NW: I would think it would be very easy to get sucked into doing managerial things all the time, because they're always in your face.

Lewis: Always there. Parents drop into the school unannounced all the time and expect you to be there and accessible to them. Would you go to your dentist and walk in the door and say, "I'm here. Would you mind cleaning my teeth?" I don't think you'd do that. But you want to accommodate them. You work with them. It's just one more ball to juggle. About the time you think you're getting someplace, you'll get a 50-page federal or state report you have to do.

If there's a fault or a weakness in the principalship, it's that you have to do those managerial kinds of things. You can't put those tasks aside. They have to be done. That's why administrators are at schools on weekends and vacations.

NW: Do you ever regret going in to this field?

Lewis: Never. I think I've got the best job in the world. And I've thought that about every school I've been in. What energizes you and keeps you going are the students. You're having a bad day, just go sit in the classroom and watch the teaching and learning that takes place.

NW: Would it be ideal for a school if there could be a manager who could deal with all the paperwork and the bureaucratic stuff and then the principal could just be the instructional leader and visionary and work with teachers?

Lewis: That's a fantasy. It's not going to happen. Again, you have to balance, prioritize. It used to be that people saw the assistant principalship as a hammer—as the person who did all those managerial tasks. But I never viewed it that way. When I was at Hillsboro, I had three assistant principals, and I viewed that position as a training ground for them. I didn't want them just to be the arm of the law. They needed to have a background in working with curriculum, working with departments. They needed to have a background in finance, how to build a budget, what all the legal ramifications were. So we rotated assignments.

There are days when I'll have four or five things I need to get done, and suddenly the day will be over and I haven't done one of them. You have to then ask yourself, "Which of these can I take home, or which ones can I deal with tomorrow?" It's the returning the phone calls and those kinds of things. That's a very good interview question, by the way. When applicants for any position come in, you give them an in-basket of activities—eight or nine things that need to be done—and ask them, "How are you going to prioritize those tasks?" That's gives you a real sense of their approach to the job. ■

PREPARING TO LEAD

Seattle invests in new ways to train principals

By Lee Sherman

Talk with a Seattle educator for 10 or 15 minutes about school reform, and you're certain to hear the name John Stanford spoken in respectful, even reverent, tones. The retired Army general raised a few eyebrows when, without the usual education credentials, he took the superintendent's post in 1995. But he so entirely won over the doubters that when he died of leukemia just a few years into his tenure, all eyes were as misty as Lake Washington at dawn.

A year and a half after his death, the *Seattle Times* describes a city "still infatuated" with his memory. *Education Week*, noting that new schools chief Joseph Olchefske has "big shoes to fill," asserts that Stanford casts a shadow larger than another prominent Seattle "icon," the Space Needle.

What was it about this man that so energized the flagging district? Why were disenchanted parents suddenly giving the district a second look? Why were disheartened staff feeling transfused with new optimism?

Those who worked for him point to his zealous commitment to Mount Rainier-like standards for each and every student and staff member—a commitment that infected the district from top to bottom.

"He changed our vision from 'every child can learn' to 'every child will learn, and everybody needs to do whatever it takes to see that through,'" the district's spokeswoman Annemarie Hou told *Education Week* soon after Stanford's death. "A John Stanford only comes along once in a lifetime, but the whole community is committed to keeping that focus alive."

At John Hay Elementary School on Queen Anne Hill, not far from the central office where Stanford worked, the principal is consciously putting Stanford's vision into practice.

"John Stanford had a way of making people feel that there was some greatness in them," says Joanne Testa-Cross. "I have tried to carry that with me." This legacy—bringing out the greatness in every teacher and every child—is, she says, her main mission as building leader.

THE PRICE OF POWER. It was not just Stanford's words and example, however, that influenced Testa-Cross. She credits a Stanford-initiated training program with changing and shaping her view of the job.

The Principal Leadership Institute, launched by the Alliance for Education in 1996 at Stanford's behest, aims to help Seattle's principals tackle the new demands of an increasingly complex role. One key change affecting principals in Seattle and beyond is the decentralization of authority. Site-based management—which gives schools more latitude to make decisions—puts more power in the hands of principals (in theory, anyway). But power has its price: added responsibilities, new aggravations, more accountability.

John Stanford wanted to fashion a whole new identity for these newly liberated (and newly burdened) administrators. One of his first moves was to give them the title of CEO. In borrowing language from the corporate world, Stanford was sending a signal about the enlarged role he envisioned for his building leaders.

"When we talk about the principal as CEO," says Pat Kile of the Alliance, "what we mean is that he or she is responsible for strategic planning, for budgeting, for creating an academic achievement plan, for hiring and firing staff, for making decisions about how to use the resources that come in."

The Alliance, a nonprofit charitable foundation dedicated to helping Seattle schools succeed, was the logical place to locate a districtwide leadership training program, says Kile, Vice President for Strategic Initiatives. One of the Alliance's three goals—excellent leadership at all levels—made the Principal Leadership Institute a perfect fit. (The other two goals are increased academic achievement and a stable pool of private dollars to supplement tax dollars.)

After doing a national search for a suitable program, the Alliance adopted the research-based model developed by the Mayerson Academy. Every Seattle principal received training from the Cincinnati-based firm around five strands of leadership:

- Direction
- Accountability
- Selection and development of staff
- Instructional leadership
- Positive relationships

"The beauty of Mayerson is that it takes best practices from business, but the trainers are educators," says Testa-Cross. "It covers everything from the conceptual to the everyday. It gets right down to nuts and bolts—even to doing some simulations. It was very beneficial. I apply it *all*."

For Testa-Cross, the training dovetailed perfectly with her role as the new principal at John Hay Elementary.

"I learned how to create a vision, how to make it a living, breathing way of life in the school," she says. "I'd had classes on vision, ad nauseam. What I hadn't learned was how to make the vision really substantive, alive, and exciting."

BEYOND ISOLATED SKILLS. Like many school administrators, Testa-Cross found a lot to criticize in her preservice training. She describes the university coursework that led to her principal's credential as fragmented and often unchallenging. "There were some very excellent courses, and some that were not," she says. "What was missing was cohesion—there were gaps, not enough connections. I would have liked more rigor in certain areas—instructional leadership, effective conferencing with teachers, working with high-performing teachers, building morale, teamwork, culture."

Researchers and practitioners alike are blunt to brutal in their criticism of principal training. In *School Leadership: Handbook for Excellence,* Larry Lashway and Mark Anderson capture the reigning opinion this way: "If administrator-training programs were movies, the reviews would be unanimous: 'two thumbs down.' Over the years, critics have strained for adjectives to express their low opinion: 'dismal,' 'dysfunctional,' and 'zombie' are typical epithets."

Joseph Murphy of Vanderbilt University's Peabody College has summarized the long list of complaints:

- Little effort to weed out poor candidates
- An ill-defined knowledge base with few standards
- Minimal academic rigor
- A fragmented curriculum
- Lack of connection to the world of practice
- Uninspired instructional methods
- Poorly regarded faculty
- Lack of diversity in students and faculty
- Reliance on an academic rather than professional model
- A part-time student body that is tired, distracted, and pressed for time

The principal's pivotal role in school reform makes solid training an imperative. At the same time that schools face enormous pressure to improve, huge numbers of experienced principals stand on the brink of retirement. The shortage of talent—already being felt nationwide—threatens to become a crisis over the next decade.

In response, "a broad and influential group of policy contingents" have leapt to action, *Education Week* reported in January. "Among the players are the U.S. Department of Education, the Broad Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, state governors and education officials, and the leaders of several national corporations." Together, they are ponying up millions of dollars to fund research and programs. Much of that money is targeted at rethinking the way we prepare and train principals.

Nothing less than the fate of school reform is at stake, *Education Week* reporter Lynn Olson asserts. "The sheer abundance" of grants and research projects aimed at overhauling principal training, she writes, "reflects a widespread—and growing—recognition that without strong leaders at the helm, larger efforts to improve student achievement will likely falter, if not fail entirely."

The problem is longstanding. The National Association for Elementary School Principals declared in its 1990 report *Principals for the 21st Century* that if principal preparation programs are to keep up with the accelerating pace of reform, they need "major surgery." By most accounts, the patient is still on the operating table. In a work whose conclusions still hold true, *Principals: How to Train, Recruit, Select, Induct, and Evaluate Leaders for America's Schools,* published by the ERIC Clearinghouse for Educational Management in 1991, Anderson speaks in lofty terms of the task facing principal preparation programs.

"Preparing enlightened administrators who are committed to the continuous development of their intellect and character and who can 'lead with their hearts,'" he writes, "requires moving beyond training on isolated skills to the cultivation of courage, faith, deep commitment to collaborative action and shared decisionmaking, and reflection and judgment."

Lashway and Anderson have pulled together the criticisms of current programs to come up with a laundry list for a new approach. Effective principal preparation programs, they say, should:

Bridge the gap between theory and practice—Good programs will use instructional strategies that simultaneously provide students with a solid theoretical framework and a practical understanding of real-world problems.

Use new kinds of delivery systems—Innovative programs are replacing the traditional evening lecture format with such practices as indepth weekend seminars and mentorships with practicing principals.

Incorporate field-based experience—Candidates are being given such real-world assignments as interviewing administrators, designing a staff inservice plan, conducting a teacher evaluation, or shadowing a principal.

Provide internships—The capstone of a good preparation program is a carefully designed and supervised internship in which aspiring principals are placed in a school and asked to function as a principal.

Three of the four points above stress the need to link learning to real schools and practicing principals. Too often, critics charge, principal training does little to prepare administrators for the furious pace, the unwieldy task list, and the bubbling stew of human interactions they typically encounter when they report for work.

"School administrators face complex problems that aren't solved by mastering a handful of principles taught in a college classroom," Arnold Danzig of Colorado State University told *Education World* in a 1998 interview. "Universities need to bridge the gap between theory and practice by drawing from the experiences of practicing professionals in the field."

One way to do that, Danzig says, is through a teaching strategy he calls "narrative research." Graduate students in Danzig's Leadership Development class choose a school leader who's willing to share his or her background, philosophy, and experiences in two or more indepth interviews over the semester. The first interview focuses on the leader's career history and strengths. The second zeroes in on a real issue or problem the leader has run into on the job. Danzig's students have studied problems ranging from school vandalism to student fights, suicide threats, contract negotiations, weapons on campus, hostile parents, drunken students—even a hostage situation. As they delve into the details of these authentic challenges, students begin to unravel the many threads of meaning that are woven into each situation.

"Leadership stories are a powerful tool for connecting the privileged discourse of universities with the smart hands of experience," Danzig told *Education World*. "Stories add a fullness to understanding what it is people do in their daily professional lives. Professionals need to understand not only the technical aspects of the job but the moral basis of their work. Stories provide a more complete view of the meaning of professional practice."

The Mayerson training that Testa-Cross got in Seattle draws heavily on stories from the field.

"They have amazing stories to go along with their concepts," she says.

Leaders need stories to tell, experts say. In fact, Howard Gardner of Harvard University argues that strong storytelling skills are essential to leadership.

"The ability to tell a story that resonates with the deepest ideals and aspirations of followers" is what Gardner means by storytelling in the context of leadership, according to Lashway. The stories leaders tell are about themselves and their groups, about where they're coming from and where they're headed, about what is to be feared, struggled against, and dreamed about, to borrow Gardner's poetic words.

"Leaders fashion stories—principally stories of identity," he writes in his 1995 book, *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership*. "It is important that a leader be a good storyteller, but equally crucial that the leader embody that story in his or her life."

RESEARCH MARRIES PRACTICE. The story made Page One in Seattle's papers when Rudy Crew signed on to the University of Washington in January. He will lead the K-12 Leadership Institute just launched at UW. The former Tacoma superintendent is back in the Northwest after surviving more than four years as chancellor of the New York City schools—one of the roughest, toughest tests of leadership skill any administrator could face.

In Seattle, a city still saddened by the loss of Stanford, comparisons between the two administrators "are unavoidable," the *Times* noted after Crew's arrival. The newspaper describes both as self-made men who pulled themselves up from humble beginnings to become charismatic, visionary leaders and passionate champions of children.

Crew now has turned that passion toward preparing principals "to act more like entrepreneurs" instead of simply following the directives of the central office. UW's new institute will tackle principal training from a new angle, its creators say. Instead of bringing practitioners to the training, the institute will bring the training to the practitioners.

The UW's institute was billed in early announcements as "a unique partnership between higher education and public schools that would move beyond certifying educators and bestowing degrees," the *Times* reported in January. "The institute would work with educators in the schools rather than in a university-class setting. Ongoing education research, at the UW and other places, would be integrated into the training."

This "marriage" between research and practice is an important alliance.

"It's not just about bringing hope to the table, but structuring a cogent, clear pathway between education research and practitioners," Crew told the *Times*.

The institute will tailor its training to the needs of districts, says Louis Fox, Vice Provost for Educational Partnerships, the UW office that will house and operate the institute.

"In the reform and accountability environment that we're in," says Fox, "some districts would be most interested in issues around low-performing schools, for instance. Other issues might be budget and finance. Here in Seattle, the district is talking about building genuine leadership teams at all 97 schools, made up of parents, teachers, and school leaders."

And for pressing problems besetting schools, the institute will respond with "just-in-time" support, Fox says. "We want to be a resource that school leaders can begin to rely on when they encounter challenging situations."

A network of principals and best practices will be yet another feature of the institute, as will residential academies for school leaders. Some programs will start this summer.

The crisis in school leadership presents a national challenge that the UW K-12 Leadership Institute hopes to address. Coupled with a surge in principal and teacher retirements is a rise in enrollments that is putting even more pressure on the system. But in that growing crisis, Fox sees a chance for change.

"It is probably one of the greatest opportunities that's been in front of American public education in a generation or longer," he says. "With new leaders and new teachers, you really have an opportunity to reinvent schooling. At this institution, we have decided that our focus in that arena is going to be on school leadership. We want to do it on a national scale."

WRESTLING WITH TECHNOLOGY. The UW is going national with yet another leadership initiative. The Smart Tools Academy is well on its way to giving every principal and superintendent in the state of Washington a crash course in information technologies. Intense interest from other states prompted the university to look at sharing its strategies across the land. In March, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation—which funded Smart Tools—committed $100 million to spreading the academy's strategies to every state through grants to business and education consortia.

The need for technology training for administrators is acute. A 10-year study by the National Association of Elementary School Principals reported in 1998 that principals' "greatest professional development need is help understanding and utilizing technology to improve administrative tasks and classroom instruction."

"The proliferation of technology has many of us struggling to stay abreast of the most recent innovations and applications," researchers James Doud and Edward Keller note in their report, *The K-8 Principal in 1998*. "This issue will consume much of principals' time and attention well into the 21st century."

Smart Tools germinated a couple of years ago when a bunch of technology-related businesses in Washington were trying to figure out which factors—taxes, land use, telecommunications policy, etcetera—most helped to "sustain and grow the innovation economy," Fox recounts. One thing kept bobbing to the surface in these discussions: education.

"Being the kind of industries that they are, they depend on intellectual capital," Fox notes.

So this group, the Technology Alliance—which brings together CEOs from biotechnology, information technology, electronics technology, trade associations, and four major research institutions—launched a high-powered task force on K-12 education in Washington. Fox sat on the task force, along with such luminaries as State Superintendent of Public Instruction Terry Bergeson, Bill Gates, Sr., and Governor Gary Locke. A series of case studies compiled by the task force spotlighted a recurring theme.

"One thing came up over and over, in districts large and small, urban and rural, rich and poor," Fox says. "For those that were most successful in integrating technology thoughtfully into the school environment, the most pivotal thing and the key component was school leaders."

"SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS FACE COMPLEX PROBLEMS THAT AREN'T SOLVED BY MASTERING A HANDFUL OF PRINCIPLES TAUGHT IN A COLLEGE CLASSROOM."

So Fox pitched an idea: How about doing a leadership institute for each and every school leader in the state over a short period of time?

"For a group of CEOs to reach out to the CEOs in the schools made perfectly good sense," Fox observes.

The program was piloted in the spring of 1999, backed by $6 million from the Gates Foundation and additional funds from SAP, a software company. By March, in a series of intensive, four-day, residential academies around the state, the program had trained 1,000 of the state's 2,300 principals and superintendents. The rest will receive training by summer's end.

The academy's faculty—who are mostly practicing educators and specialists in education technology—guide participants in facilitated discussions, online coursework, and hands-on workshops with computer hardware and software. They touch on "all the issues associated with introducing and integrating technology into a learning environment—administration, support, issues around levies, networking, building technological capacity in schools, curriculum, professional development for teachers," Fox says.

The principals bring computer skills ranging from zero to vast. Most fall somewhere in the middle. The academy does a lot of "deliberate social engineering"—mixing the old hands with the newbies. "There's an interesting group dynamic that arises," Fox says. "They begin to teach one another. In many ways, they have the kind of experience that you'd like kids to have in a classroom working in groups. It's a little chaotic and noisy, but people learn a great deal. It's fun to watch."

For more information about the Smart Tools Academy, contact Susannah Malarkey, Academy Codirector, Executive Director of the Technology Alliance, susannahm@seattlechamber.com, (206) 389-7348, or, Louis Fox, Academy Codirector, Vice Provost for Educational Partnerships, University of Washington, lfox@u.washington.edu, (206) 685-4745.

DOWN AT THE DISTRICT. Besides applauding the kinds of innovative university-based programs UW boasts, researchers are calling for district-based programs. The Seattle School District, with its Principal Leadership Institute, is running ahead of the pack. Only a quarter of 400 districts surveyed in 1998 had a program for identifying and grooming leaders among current staff members, *Education Week* reported in January.

The John Stanford-initiated principal training in the Seattle district has made a seismic shift in the way Testa-Cross looks at her job.

"I now believe that leadership makes a difference," she says. "I have confidence to take risks. I know systems *can* work."

Before the training, she had deep doubts about her power to ignite change in her school. She felt stymied by the bureaucracy. She felt other hands were at the controls.

"What I have realized," she says, "is that with good leadership, you can align systems to benefit the cause. Good leaders know that there are definite ways to motivate people that make all the difference. And, most important, if you stay focused on the vision, it can come true." ■

ACCOUNTABILITY AND AUTHORITY

What Principals Need in a Performance-Based System

By Brian Barker

THE NATIONAL STANDARDS MOVEMENT has made dramatic changes in teaching and learning.

This new performance-based system is profoundly transforming the principal's role and responsibilities.

The Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP) formed a task force to examine issues of responsibility, accountability, and authority in a system increasingly driven by student performance. The task force—made up of administrators from all levels of schooling, from Eastern and Western Washington, and from the smallest rural districts to the biggest urban ones—is grappling with defining the principal's role in improving academic achievement; determining the skills, knowledge, support, and authority needed for that task; and defining the principal's responsibilities in this mission.

Student achievement in a performance-based school is a shared responsibility involving the student, family, educators, and the community. The principal's leadership is essential to this process. As leader, the principal is accountable for the continuous growth of students and increased school performance as measured over time by state standards and locally determined indicators. In this performance-based school, the principal has a complex set of responsibilities, including: (1) develop, implement, and monitor procedures and practices that promote a safe and orderly school environment; (2) influence, establish, and sustain a school culture conducive to continuous improvement for students and staff; (3) lead the development, implementation, and evaluation of data-driven plans for improvement of student achievement; (4) assist instructional staff in aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment with state and local learning goals; (5) monitor, assist, and evaluate staff implementation of school improvement plans and effective instructional and assessment practices; (6) manage human and financial resources to accomplish student achievement goals; (7) communicate and partner with colleagues, parents, and community members to promote student learning. The responsibilities outlined in 3, 4, and 5 above are at the heart of the principal's new role.

After spirited discussions and debates on the many issues surrounding the principal's changing role, the task force has hammered out the following list of the essential support and authority principals must have in order to succeed in the current reform climate. In a performance-based system with student achievement as the main focus of principal accountability, principals need:

■ **Principal Professional Development.** Principals express a need to receive ongoing professional development, especially in the areas of assessment and evaluation in a performance-based system. There is strong support for training before holding the principal accountable for knowing, in much the same way that principals guide and assist staff members with knowledge and skill before holding them accountable for knowing.

■ **Authority to Select and Accept Transfers of Teachers Based Upon Proven Positive Performance with Student Achievement.** Principals clearly understand their accountability for student achievement. To truly cause that to happen, principals must be diligent and vigilant in recruiting and selecting the very best staff. Simply accepting a transferring teacher because he or she is the most senior, as is the case with many current contractual agreements, does not ensure that the best quality teachers are teaching our children. A revision of contract and conferring of authority to staff the building without seniority as the main means of placement is a critical factor in principal, teacher, and student success.

■ **Authority to Appropriately Respond to Building Data.** Just as authentic classroom assessment informs future instruction and may require the teacher to make important and necessary adjustments to the lesson plan, so the principal wants the authority to respond to the realities identified in the building data. Developing the school improvement plan and adjusting the plan as a result of yearly data analysis provides a clear focus on activities that improve student performance. Learning becomes the heart of school programs.

■ **Authority to Direct Finances Toward Student Achievement Goals.** The principal needs the authority to work with staff in determining how building budgets will be spent to improve student achievement. That could include, for example, materials purchase, supplemental materials or experiences for staff development, hardware, or software. The concern voiced here is that the building staff be able to use school resources to do the work they believe to be most important based upon building need and operative data.

■ **Authority to Direct Building Staff Development Efforts.** The general consensus is that the principal, working with the building team, would be in the position to know staff needs and to guide staff development efforts accordingly. As building leader, the principal is responsible for diagnosis of staff need in professional development and in assisting staff members in having the resources and knowledge base needed to maintain high academic standards.

■ **Availability and Authority to Make Alternative Placements for High-Risk and Disruptive Students.** Principals have to balance individual student needs with the safety and welfare of all students in the school. Students who show a pattern of violent or disruptive behavior cause serious problems in the learning process. The availability of alternative programs and the authority to place students in such programs are essential elements for a safe and orderly school environment.

A principal's key task is to build a structure of relationships in the school so that all children have the opportunity to learn. To do this, principals must have and use professional knowledge and skills to create a school environment in which children can achieve their potential.

The task force continues its work, focusing on designing a set of indicators and authentic assessments for the specific tasks and responsibilities facing today's principal. These indicators and assessments will allow principals to better evaluate themselves and conduct meaningful dialogue with supervisors as part of the goal-setting and evaluation process.

For more information on the AWSP Accountability Task Force and a wealth of other issues related to the principalship, contact the Association of Washington School Principals in Olympia at (360) 357-7951, or visit the Web site at www.awsp.org.

Brian Barker is Executive Director of the Association of Washington School Principals. ■

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GROWING GREAT TEACHERS

Professional Development That Works

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

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NW EDUCATION
VOLUME 5 NUMBER 4
SUMMER 2000

ON THE COVER:
Teacher Kristen Sprecher reads to an engaged group of students at Warm Springs Elementary School in Central Oregon, where aggressive professional development efforts and an innovative approach to developing the language skills of Native American children have helped both teachers and students succeed. Story begins on Page 8.
PHOTOGRAPH BY JUDY BLANKENSHIP

Growing Great Teachers
Professional Development That Works

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In the annals of child development, there's a legendary story about an Olympic athlete who once spent a day trying to mimic the movements of a young child. After a morning of crawling, toddling, playing peek-a-boo, and exploring the universe through all his senses, the well-conditioned athlete was begging for a nap.

I know just how he feels. On the days when I get to visit classrooms where good things are happening, I do my best to keep pace with the teachers who make it all happen. They are a tireless bunch. Following them around with my notepad and camera, I am amazed by how they manage to segue from one topic and teachable moment to the next. They circulate throughout the room so that every child has a chance for one-on-one attention. They typically have a game plan for how the day will unfold, but are wise enough to revise it on the fly to accommodate unexpected opportunities or obstacles to their students' learning. While these site visits tend to leave me gasping by the afternoon recess, the teachers sail through the day with grace, good humor, and an eagerness to keep learning new ways to help their students succeed.

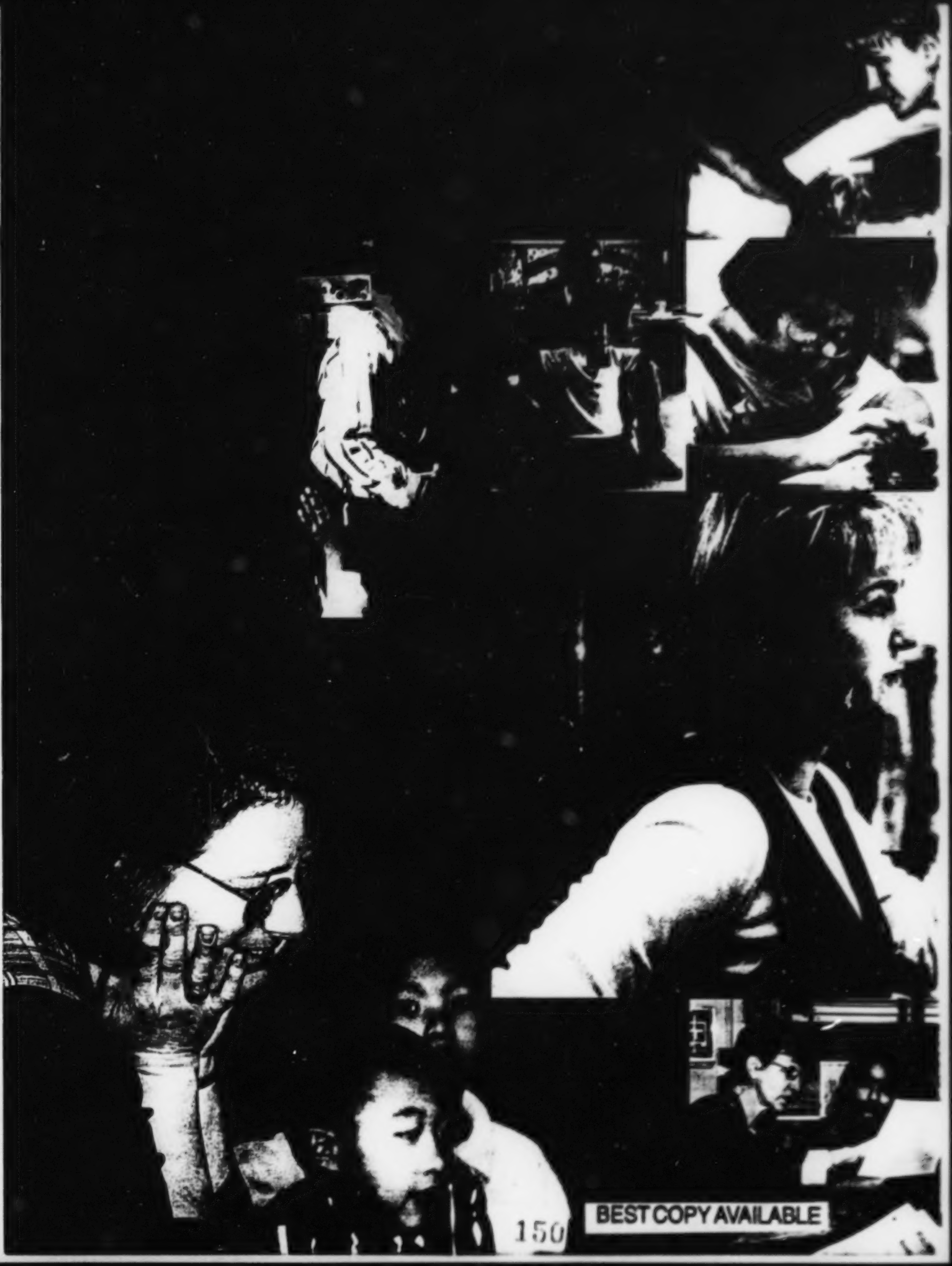
How do they manage? What helps good teachers thrive and continue to sharpen their classroom skills throughout their careers? Those are some of the questions we explore in this issue of *Northwest Education*.

Professional development is hardly a new topic in education. But it's becoming increasingly important as education reformers recognize that teachers are the key to school improvement.

It's no accident, then, that the stories in this issue focus on what helps teachers learn. We start by looking at what researchers know about effective professional development. Then, we embark on a tour of some exceptional staff development programs across the Northwest. They differ in the specifics, but all of them view teachers as active learners and full partners in school improvement. Two institutions in the region — the district in Edmonds, Washington, and Warm Springs Elementary School in Oregon — have won recognition from the U.S. Department of Education for their professional development models. In northern Idaho and Portland, Oregon, other models are being used with success to deepen teachers' classroom skills. Finally, we visit two teachers whose quest for knowledge has taken them far beyond the borders of the Northwest.

So take a deep breath and join us for a classroom journey that promises to be exhilarating, exhausting, and inspiring. For good teachers, it's all in a day's work.

—Suzie Boss
boss@nwrel.org



GREAT EXPECTATIONS

After a decade of focusing on high standards for students, education reformers are now recognizing teachers as the critical link between setting goals and helping students reach them. That brings up a new question: How can we support teachers so they will keep learning, too?

BY SUZIE BOSS

At the end of a long day, his classroom empty, an Oregon teacher pushes aside the stack of English papers he's grading, takes off his glasses, and allows himself a moment to vent. "Every time I pick up the newspaper I read another story questioning the job we're doing as teachers," he says. "Why aren't our test scores higher? Why can't our kids do more? Why do Japanese or German kids do better?" The irony is, this man happens to be an exceptional teacher, praised by parents, students, and colleagues. But some days, it seems as if the whole country expects him to do a better job.

During the third National Education Summit last fall, conference co-chair Louis Gerstner Jr. argued the case for better teaching: "If we don't have great teachers, we won't have great students. It's simple."

President Clinton has spelled out the challenge this way: "Every child needs—and deserves—dedicated, outstanding teachers, who know their subject matter, are effectively trained, and know how to teach to higher standards and to make learning come alive for students."

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future has set 2006 as the target date for an ambitious goal, "providing every student in America with what should be his or her educational birthright: access to competent, caring, qualified teachers in schools organized for success."

Teaching—long known as "the essential profession" because it lays the groundwork for all other careers—is becoming an essential component of education reform. During the past decade, reform efforts have focused on setting high standards for what students should learn and designing tools to measure their progress. Now, the focus is shifting to classroom teachers as the critical link between setting goals and helping students reach them. As James W. Stigler and James Hiebert explain in *The Teaching Gap*, published last year, "Teaching is the next frontier in the continuing struggle to improve schools. Standards set the course, and assessments provide the benchmarks, but it is teaching that must be improved to push us along the path to success."

The classroom pressures are intense. *Teacher Quality*, a 1999 report from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), acknowledges that teachers "are being asked to learn new methods of teaching, while at the same time they are facing the greater challenges of rapidly increasingly technological changes and greater diversity in the classroom." Less than half of American teachers feel equipped to meet these new challenges, according to NCES. *Teacher Quality* reports that relatively few teachers feel well prepared to integrate educational technology into classroom instruction, meet the needs of challenging students (such as those with limited English skills or disabilities), or use the student performance assessment techniques that many states and districts now require.

How can we hope to deliver on the promise of a competent, caring teacher for every classroom, without making teachers feel overwhelmed or defensive about the job they're doing? Better teacher preparation is one focus of current reform efforts. Just as critical is on-the-job training to help those already in the classroom meet the expanding challenges of their profession. *Quality Counts 2000*, a special report published by *Education Week* in January, makes a case for stepping up the rigor of both preservice and inservice training available to the nation's teachers. The "pipeline" for beginning teachers is more of a leaky faucet, according to *Quality Counts*, and "states are not doing nearly enough to help teachers reach their full potential as educators and to keep them from quitting the profession."

If teaching practices and student results are to improve, research suggests that teachers need time and opportunities to be active learners themselves. School environments that allow teachers to learn also inspire student learning. As *Teacher Quality* concludes, "Continued learning is a key to building educators' capacity for effective teaching, particularly in a profession where the demands are changing and expanding." Authors of *The Teaching Gap* add a hopeful message to the discussion about professional development: "Teaching lies within the control of teachers. It is something we can study and improve …. Schools must be places where teachers, as well as students, can learn."

Indeed, given the right environment, the daily activities of teachers can be transformed into opportunities for ongoing learning. Writing in the *Journal of Staff Development* last summer, authors Fred H. Wood and Frank McQuarrie Jr. report the benefits of job-embedded learning—"learning by doing, reflecting on the experience, and then generating and sharing new insights and learning with oneself and others."

By observing the colleagues she most admires, a young Idaho teacher has arrived at this conclusion: "A good teacher is an ardent learner."

WHAT HELPS TEACHERS GROW

In education, there's no shortage of opportunities for professional development. Indeed, it's a virtual industry, complete with summer institutes, online classes, mountains of how-to books, scholarly journals, Web sites, satellite broadcasts, and experts promising to deliver smart answers to vexing questions.

But a growing consensus holds that such plentiful choices have failed to produce consistent improvements in teacher quality. "Although nearly all public school teachers participate in some sort of professional development activity each year, very few educators receive the types of opportunities that have been demonstrated to be effective," assert researchers from the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy at the University of Washington.

Good professional development allows teachers to

ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS

According to the U.S. Department of Education, high quality professional development for teachers:

- Focuses on teachers as central to student learning, yet includes all other members of the school community
- Focuses on individual, collegial, and organizational improvement
- Respects and nurtures the intellectual and leadership capacity of teachers, principals, and others in the school community
- Reflects best available research and practice in teaching, learning, and leadership
- Enables teachers to develop further experience in subject content, teaching strategies, uses of technologies, and other essential elements in teaching to high standards
- Promotes continuous inquiry and improvement embedded in the daily life of schools
- Is planned collaboratively by those who will participate in and facilitate that development
- Requires substantial time and other resources
- Is driven by a coherent long-term plan
- Is evaluated ultimately on its impact on teacher effectiveness and student learning, and this assessment guides subsequent professional development efforts

—U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1997

BEYOND ONE-SHOT WORKSHOPS

Short-term workshops—for years the bread-and-butter of staff development—are far from the only choice open to teachers who want to expand their skills or deepen their knowledge. *High-Quality Professional Development: An Essential Component of Successful Schools*, a 1998 NWREL "By Request" booklet by Kit Peixotto and Jennifer Fager, outlines several alternatives to one-size-fits-all workshops and describes promising programs throughout the Northwest. In addition to summer institutes and college courses to strengthen a teacher's subject knowledge, the authors suggest:

Action research—Whether conducted individually or in teams, action research engages teachers in designing and pursuing investigations. Teachers pose questions related to their own school goals or classroom situations. Then, by collecting and analyzing data, and sharing results with colleagues, teachers gain insights that can inform and shape classroom practices.

Study groups—Typically organized around a particular topic of interest, study groups bring colleagues together for reading, discussion, site visits, or other collaborative activities. Science teachers at a middle school, for example, could form a study group to learn how they could improve the school's science fair through the use of inquiry-based learning.

Staff retreats—Taking a cue from business professionals, educators are discovering the benefits of getting together for an uninterrupted brainstorming session to develop goals and action plans targeting specific needs of their school. Similarly, work days enable teams of teachers to focus on a particular task, such as planning a thematic unit.

Scoring student work samples—To better tie standards with staff development, staff come together to learn to use scoring guides or rubrics to evaluate student work. Such activities not only provide teachers with an opportunity to gain and practice new skills in the area of assessment, but also engage them in thoughtful conversations with colleagues about standards-based instruction.

Site visits—Teachers who are considering a new approach or strategy benefit from a chance to observe what such a practice looks like in "real life." School visits are more informative when there is a close match between visitor and host schools. Visitors will benefit from time to ask questions and discuss what they have observed with their hosts.

Networks—Whether conducted face-to-face or through electronic means, networks allow teachers the opportunity to exchange ideas, tap into the expertise of colleagues, and build learning communities. Networks are often organized around specific content areas.

Peer coaching and mentoring—Both approaches strengthen teachers' practice in the environment where it matters most—the classroom. Coaching is most often a peer relationship while mentoring typically involves a more experienced teacher paired with a novice.

The booklet *High-Quality Professional Development* is available at no charge from NWREL, Planning and Program Development, 101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97204. Phone: (503) 275-9720.

become actively involved in their own learning and active participants in school reform. "Opportunities to engage in reflective study of teaching practices through reading, dialogue, experimentation, collaborative problem solving, observation, and peer mentoring are considered critical to effective professional development," reports Dr. Rebecca Novick of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in her 1999 publication, *Actual Schools, Possible Practices: New Directions in Professional Development*.

Drawing on research about best practices, the U.S. Department of Education has identified 10 principles of effective professional development and uses them as the basis for recognizing model programs around the country. (See sidebar, Page 5.) As the department's 1998 report, *Promising Practices: New Ways to Improve Teacher Quality*, explains, "There is now much agreement about what professional development should be. It should be focused on what teachers in individual schools need to know and be able to do for their students. Teachers should work together to design and implement professional development based on shared concerns and strengths. Ultimately, professional development should build 'professional communities' committed to higher student learning."

Island of Hope in a Sea of Dreams, released in October, reports on schools that have won the U.S. Department of Education Model Professional Development Award since its establishment in 1995. Lead author Joellen Killion of the National Staff Development Council writes, "Teachers in these schools did not walk on the moon, fight in great wars, write significant pieces of literature, discover a cure for life-threatening disease, or invent a way to end world hunger. … They work hard. … They support and coach one another in a community of learners. They demand the best of themselves and their colleagues. And, their efforts pay off in the only way that matters to them—increased student success."

This new paradigm—in which professional development is ongoing, collaborative, built into the daily routines of the schoolhouse, and tied to student success—couldn't be more different from the one-shot, pull-out workshops that most teachers have attended on designated staff training days. As Linda Darling-Hammond, Executive Director of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, explains, "These new programs envision the professional teacher as one who learns from teaching rather than as one who has finished learning how to teach." *Doing What Matters Most: Investing in Quality Teaching*, the National Commission report that Darling-Hammond coauthored in 1997, highlights professional development strategies that are:

- Experiential, engaging teachers in concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, and observation that illuminate the processes of learning and development
- Grounded in participants' questions, inquiry, and experimentation as well as professionwide research
- Collaborative, involving a sharing of knowledge among educators
- Connected to and derived from teachers' work with their students, as well as to examinations of subject matter and teaching methods
- Sustained and intensive, supported by modeling, coaching, and problem solving around specific problems of practice
- Connected to other aspects of school change

A Washington teacher describes what happened when he changed schools a few years ago: "I moved from a building where teachers either felt isolated or were bickering with their colleagues to one where the whole staff was engaged as a team, figuring out better ways to help our students learn. Being in such a positive environment has brought back my enthusiasm to teach. It's good for kids and good for staff."

See GREAT EXPECTATIONS, *Page 36*

TEACHING FROM THE HEART

On the Warm Springs Reservation, teachers offer students stability, new pathways to learning, and a connection to their tribal heritage

[illegible] and photos by [illegible]

WARM SPRINGS, Oregon— The Warm Springs Elementary School, with its long, low, central building and satellite single-wides and modulars, sits like a homely cousin amid the stately, two-story brick structures left over from Bureau of Indian Affairs days, when a boarding school occupied the site. Logging trucks rumble by on the highway just above the playground, carrying timber from Central Oregon to Portland, 100 miles away. The sprinkling of houses and tribal government buildings that constitute the town of Warm Springs radiate out from the school and up the surrounding hills. With 580 students in kindergarten to fourth grade, the school sits at the heart of the "rez," as everyone here calls the reservation. Ninety-eight percent of the children are Native American, descended from one of three tribes — the Wasco, Paiute, and Warm Springs peoples — settled on the 644,000-[illegible] reservation by a 19th century government treaty.

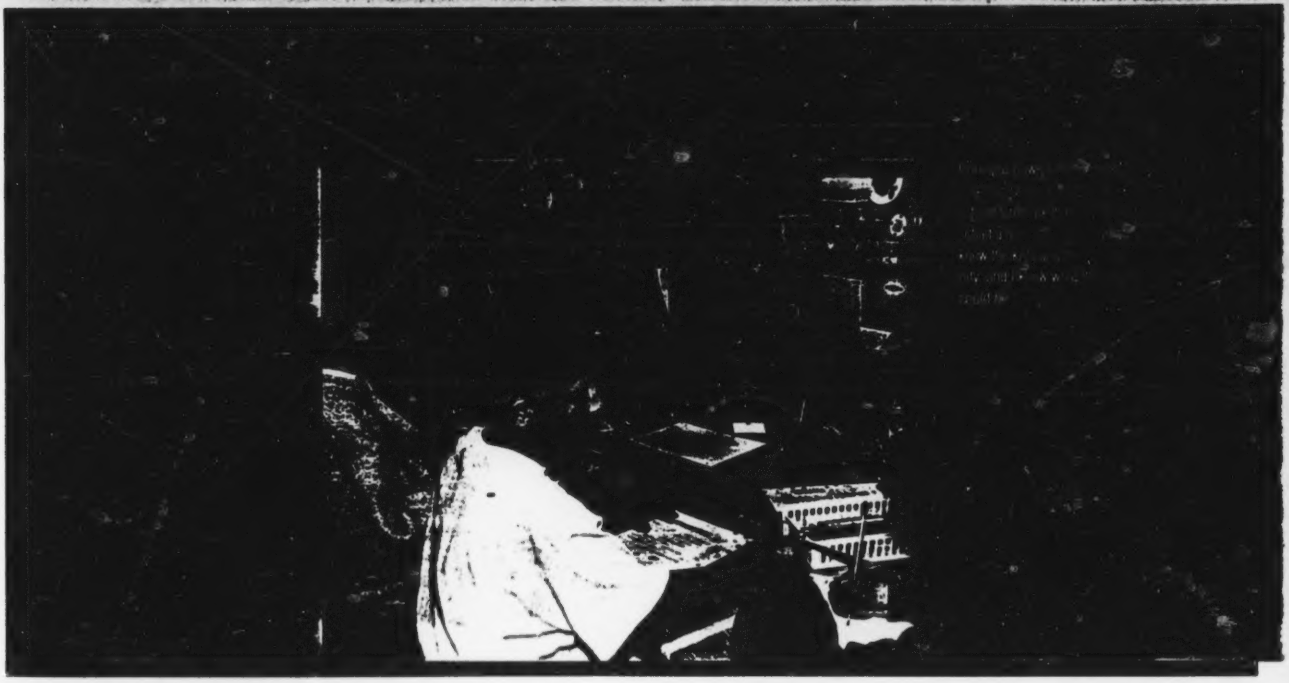
That Warm Springs Elementary would be a semifinalist in last year's U.S. Department of Education's National Awards Program for Model Professional Development seemed an impossible dream when Dawn Smith came on board as principal six years ago. A chronically high exodus of staff that had persisted for 25 years had left the school in a shambles. "Teachers and principals would come here for the experience," says Smith, "but what they got instead was a big culture shock." Some didn't even stay the year. Student attendance was spotty, achievement scores were at rock bottom, and professional development was unknown.

The remarkable turnaround of Warm Springs Elementary can be attributed to many factors, but everyone interviewed at the school earlier this year agrees that the transformation is largely due to the leadership of Dawn Smith. A Klamath Indian, Smith was recruited by the Warm Springs tribe 26 years ago while an education senior at the University of Northern Colorado. She was invited to do a year's internship with the Jefferson County School District with the promise of a job if there were openings.

The following year Smith was hired as a first grade teacher at Warm Springs, where she was one of two native teachers. She stayed [illegible]

classroom, during which time she married a Warm Springs man and had two children. In 1992, after a stint as a counselor, Smith served as vice principal for a year while a newcomer to the valley earned her principal's credentials. True to the established pattern, the previous principal left the school at the end of that year and Smith found herself at the helm of Warm Springs.

"Things were very chaotic here," remembers Smith, a 46-year-old woman with short, dark hair and a serious demeanor. "Most kids were disrespectful and did pretty much whatever they wanted. Instruction time was practically nil because behavior management was such a problem. I think that's why I got hired," Smith adds. "I had a mission. I wasn't going anywhere. I knew the kids and the community, and I knew what the school could



BEGINNING THE TURNAROUND: "NO LESS THAN FIVE YEARS"

In the summer of 1993 Smith launched into the most serious problem facing the school: recruitment and retention of staff. She let candidates applying for teaching jobs know that if they wanted to work at Warm Springs, they needed to make a commitment of five years. That eliminated a lot of applicants, she says, but it inspired others to rise to the challenge.

"My first year as principal I hired 16 new staff members," Smith recalls. "By then I knew I needed people who were committed to teaching every single kid in the school. Most of those who applied had good skills, but beyond that we were looking for teachers with good hearts, those who had a mission and who had the courage to stick it out. That's what we looked for from then on, and that's what we got."

Cary Varela was one of those who showed up for an interview that year. "I was recently divorced, raising a daughter alone, and looking for a place to put down roots. Dawn asked me to commit to five years. She said she was looking for someone who was going to make a difference." Varela adds, "I feel I have found a community here. I have no intention of leaving." Not that the work is easy. "As a bank teller I used to think that getting held up at gunpoint was hard, but this is harder!" she says. "It's the hardest job I've had, but it's also the most rewarding."

As Varela talks, her second-graders have gone home for the day and she is waiting for an ex-student, now a sixth-grader, to come in for a tutoring session. She ran into him at the Safeway in Madras the other day, she says, and "when he said he was having trouble in school, I told him to come see me. I feel responsible."

Six years later, nearly half of those teachers hired in 1993 are still at Warm Springs, and turnover of staff hired since then has slowed to a trickle. "The teachers that Dawn recruited have stayed because of her ability to retain them," says Keith Johnson, Assistant Superintendent of Jefferson County School District, "and because they are a unique bunch of young people. The sense of community among her staff is really rare, and nice when you can get it."

The first challenge facing Smith and her team was to gain control of student behavior. "We came up with behavioral guidelines for every area of the school," says Smith, "and we wrote them down: 'This is what it looks like when students are in the hallways; this is what assembly behavior looks like; this is what a classroom should look like when the teacher is doing direct instruction.' And then we agreed on how we were going to teach those behaviors to the children."

Slowly, change began to happen. The graffiti disappeared, the daily trashing of the bathrooms stopped, students began to walk quietly in the hallways, and they learned to pay attention when a teacher was talking. "No principal before Dawn was able to get control of the kids' behavior," recalls Johnson. Today the school appears to a visitor as a model of decorum as nearly 400 youngsters move between several buildings through the rhythm of a crowded school day.

PUTTING THE PUZZLE TOGETHER: CURRICULUM REFORM AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

When Smith describes the thorny process she and her staff undertook to create a unified curriculum, it sounds a lot like a bunch of people trying to put together one of those giant landscape puzzles. The tiny pieces were laid out on the table, and the eager players gathered around. They had a vision of what the final product should look like, but the challenge was fitting the pieces together to make a coherent big picture. Smith cut whole-staff meetings to once a month and organized grade-level teams to meet the other three weeks. Each team was charged with developing language arts and math curricula. Then the entire staff came together to make sure each grade-level curriculum was thorough, systemic, and met district and state goals.

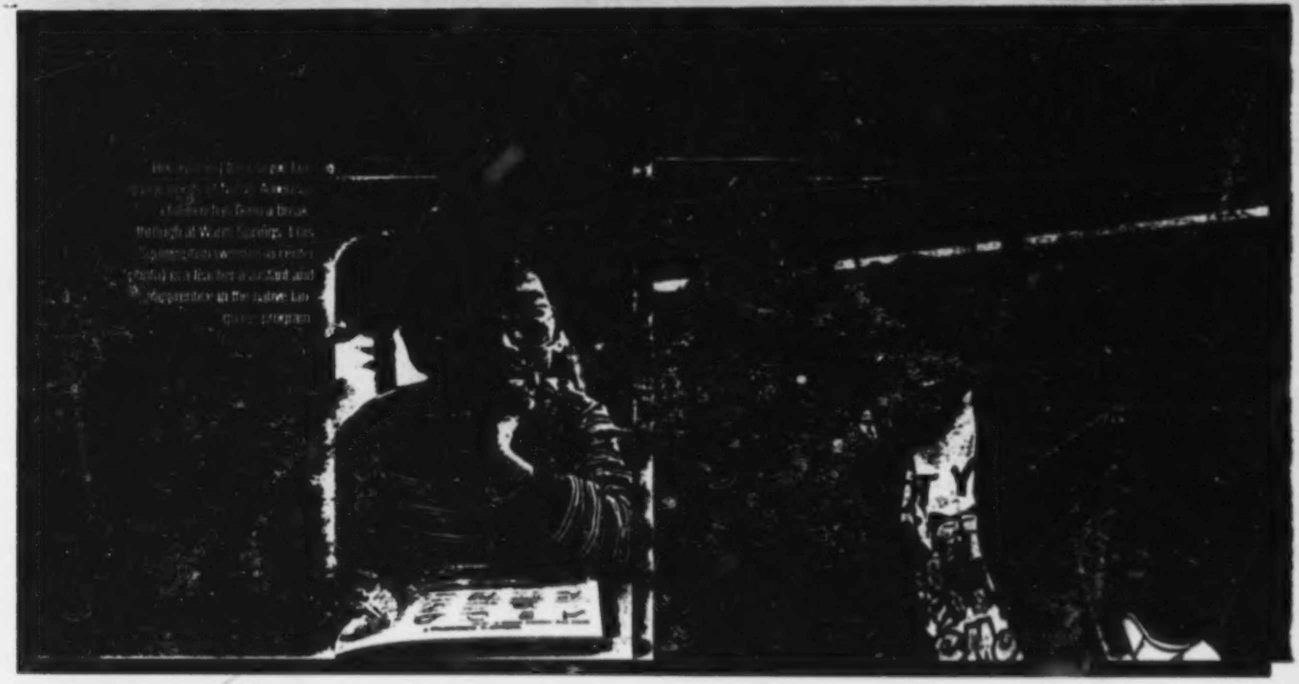
"Dawn has a gift for identifying talent in her teachers and matching that talent to the job that needs to be done," says Johnson. "She found the people on her staff who are natural curriculum writers and who could get down to the core of what needs to be taught at what grade level, and in what order. This school does more in curriculum development than any school I know in terms of teachers knowing what they're supposed to be teaching and how to teach it."

According to her staff, Principal Smith also has a particular talent for promoting creative professional development. "I've never been in a school like this, where everyone is encouraged to go out and gather information and bring it back to share," says Varela. "It's not an attitude of 'we'll try anything,' but if you can show her research, or a rationale, or at least some good example of others who have tried it, she's willing to send us for training or bring training here."

Varela gives a good example of a staff-initiated innovation. "My first year here, the average first-grade reading score was 17 percent. So the kindergarten, first-grade, and second-grade teachers formed an action research team and got money from a state department grant to hire a reading consultant. Darla Wood Walters, who lives in Bend but is from New Zealand, came to the school and trained the K-2 teachers in a reading and writing technique we call the New Zealand method. The next year the program went schoolwide. It was exciting that everyone agreed to try it."

Varela was so inspired by the success of the method that she paid her own way to New Zealand to see the program firsthand. Last year the reading scores for Warm Springs first-graders had climbed to the 40th percentile.

Other professional development initiatives unique to Warm Springs include inservice training for new teachers by tribal members on the history, infrastructure, and customs of the tribe, such as those around death and grieving. All Warm Springs staff are encouraged to take advantage of native language classes offered by a tribal Culture and Heritage Department.



[illegible] Native American children [illegible] through at Warm Springs. [illegible] (photo) is a teacher assistant and apprentice in the native language program.

MONEY HELPS: TITLE I AND ESL FUNDING

As in many turnaround tales, money has played its part in the Warm Springs transformation. In 1996, Smith proposed to the state that the entire school be classified as a Title I school. "So many of our kids are at risk," she says. "We decided early on we wanted to use the Title I funds as we saw fit rather than targeting a few kids."

The redistribution of funds means, for example, that classroom assistants can team-teach language arts in each grade to bring up reading scores. Individual and small group tutoring can be offered to students who do not meet the state benchmarks. Title I funds also provide parent resources such as Family Math & Science Nights, and support the popular Book Bucks program, which awards "money" for the purchase of books to children who show exemplary behavior such as good work, kindness, or courteousness.

However, even with a stable staff, better behaved students, and aligned curricula, the achievement scores of Warm Springs students stayed perennially low. In an effort to uncover the cause, Smith discovered research showing that Native American children whose culture is based on another language—even if that language is no longer spoken—are dealing with language-loss issues that affect their learning.

Smith knew that many of the grandparents on the reservation today grew up in boarding schools in the 1940s and '50s, when they were forbidden to speak their native language. Although that generation learned to speak enough English to meet basic communicative needs, their language learning tended to stall, or "fossilize," once they left school. They used what remained of their native language with one another, but with their own children—the parents of present-day Warm Springs students—they tended to use their limited English. This practice created a second, and then a third, generation of nonfluent English speakers who have no second language.

According to the research, the low academic achievement of Native American students is directly linked to their incomplete proficiency in either English or a native language. "We knew there was a problem here," says Johnson, "but we've never had anyone who could figure out what is was, or what to do. Dawn was able to define the problem."

With input from Johnson, Smith submitted a proposal to the Oregon Department of Education outlining why 98 percent of Warm Springs children should be classified as English-as-a-second-language (ESL) students. The state agreed, and the bilingual funding dollars that subsequently flowed into district coffers have made an enormous difference to the school. Smith enumerates some of the benefits: ESL training for all Warm Springs staff; the purchase of reading and math curricula such as Accelerated Reader and Accelerated Math; creation of a schoolwide, monthlong

summer academy rich in experiential learning and language activities; and ESL classroom assistants to support the tribal language program. The funds have also helped the school purchase "an amazing number of books," Smith adds.

Three years ago, as part of a new Heritage Language Program, native language speakers from the community began teaching kindergartners Sahaptin, the Warm Springs language, for a half-hour each day. The teachers carried over the instruction with the children as they went into first grade, and began with the new group of kindergartners. This year, the Wasco and Northern Paiute languages have been added, and next year every child from K-4 will have a daily, half-hour heritage language lesson. (See sidebar, Page 14.)

A PARTNERSHIP WITH LEWIS & CLARK

In 1998, with the ESL classification in hand, Warm Springs joined forces with Lewis & Clark College in Portland to create a unique, onsite, ESL teacher-training program. Dr. Lynn Reer, Visiting Assistant Professor of Education at Lewis & Clark and respected by colleagues as one of the best language-acquisition experts in the Northwest, worked with Smith and Johnson to design a program of instruction to equip teachers to work with the special needs of Warm Springs students whose language is caught in transition. The program consists of six classes, given onsite by Lewis & Clark instructors. The classes are offered on weekends through the school year and also during the summer academy, which in 1999 served as a "laboratory" for staff training.

"I was absolutely delighted and touched by how much the Warm Springs teachers care," says Reer. "They respect the community and want to know more about how to include their students' experiences, culture, and home life in their classroom instruction. They work hard and are eager to pick up on anything we bring them."

The last class of the two-year series is scheduled for June. Some teachers will earn their ESL endorsement, while others will put their credits toward a master's degree.

THE FUTURE

These days, the future is much on the minds of those who care about Warm Springs. After a drop in enrollment in the mid-1990s due to an aggressive tribal birth-control education program referred to as "the Norplant years," the birth rate is up again. A surge of kindergartners is expected next fall. The tribal government is working with the district to build a new school on the reservation to accommodate the newcomers and to add the fifth grade.

Julie Quaid, director of the tribal Early Childhood Education program, feels strongly that kids from Warm Springs need more time to build self-confidence and firmly establish their academic skills before they leave for school outside the

SMALL THINGS COUNT FOR BIG THINGS

Myra Shawaway, manager of the tribal Culture and Heritage Department, was born in Warm Springs of a Paiute father and raised by a grandmother who spoke Sahaptin, the language of the Warm Springs people. Typical of her generation, she did not learn a Native language. For the last [illegible] years Shawaway has worked for the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs in various programs. But with the Heritage Language Program, she has found "the place where my heart is."

Shawaway describes the program's evolution:

"**A** charter school grant in 1995 helped us get started on planning and implementation. All our staff trained for one month at the American Indian Language Development Institute at the University of Arizona. It was an experience. Many of us had never been in a college setting but by the time we left we had studied linguistics and curriculum development, and we knew how to use the library and computers.

"**Then** we came back home and sat down and said, 'now, where do we start?' The written language developed by the linguists was good but we felt it was too complicated for teaching young children. So we simplified it, keeping it as phonetic as possible but making it user friendly. Some of those who had learned the linguists' way of writing dug in their heels a little bit and said this was not the way we should go. But we faced our critics and said that's fine for writing, but what we're looking for is the ability to teach a way to speak.

"**In** 1997 three Sahaptin teachers began teaching the kindergarten kids at Warm Spring Elementary. The following year a curriculum developer came on staff to help develop a syllabus and ongoing curriculums for each grade. We had to start from the bottom up because there is no information on a curriculum for the Sahaptin language. We're barely staying one step ahead of the classes. The kids learn so quickly.

"**One** of our reasons for introducing our language program in the schools is that we have a captive audience. We could not generate enough interest in the community in language classes, but now we're seeing that as the children learn in school, the grandparents and parents are also beginning to use their native language. Grandmothers will correct the kids when they're not pronouncing a word right, for example, and when I see people in the supermarket, they'll greet me in Sahaptin. That's never happened before. Small things are counting for big things.

"**Most** of our teachers are fluent speakers, 50 years or older, who didn't have the opportunity to go to college, but we are continually doing professional development. Right now the teachers are taking college courses to build a foundation to apply for teacher certification. The professional development here has really contributed to our ability to keep the languages in the school.

"**In** the future we hope to develop content standards and benchmarks equivalent to what the state of Oregon requires. Right now we have a group from the University of Oregon and the Oregon Department of Education working with us to develop benchmarks that will be culturally sensitive to Native American languages.

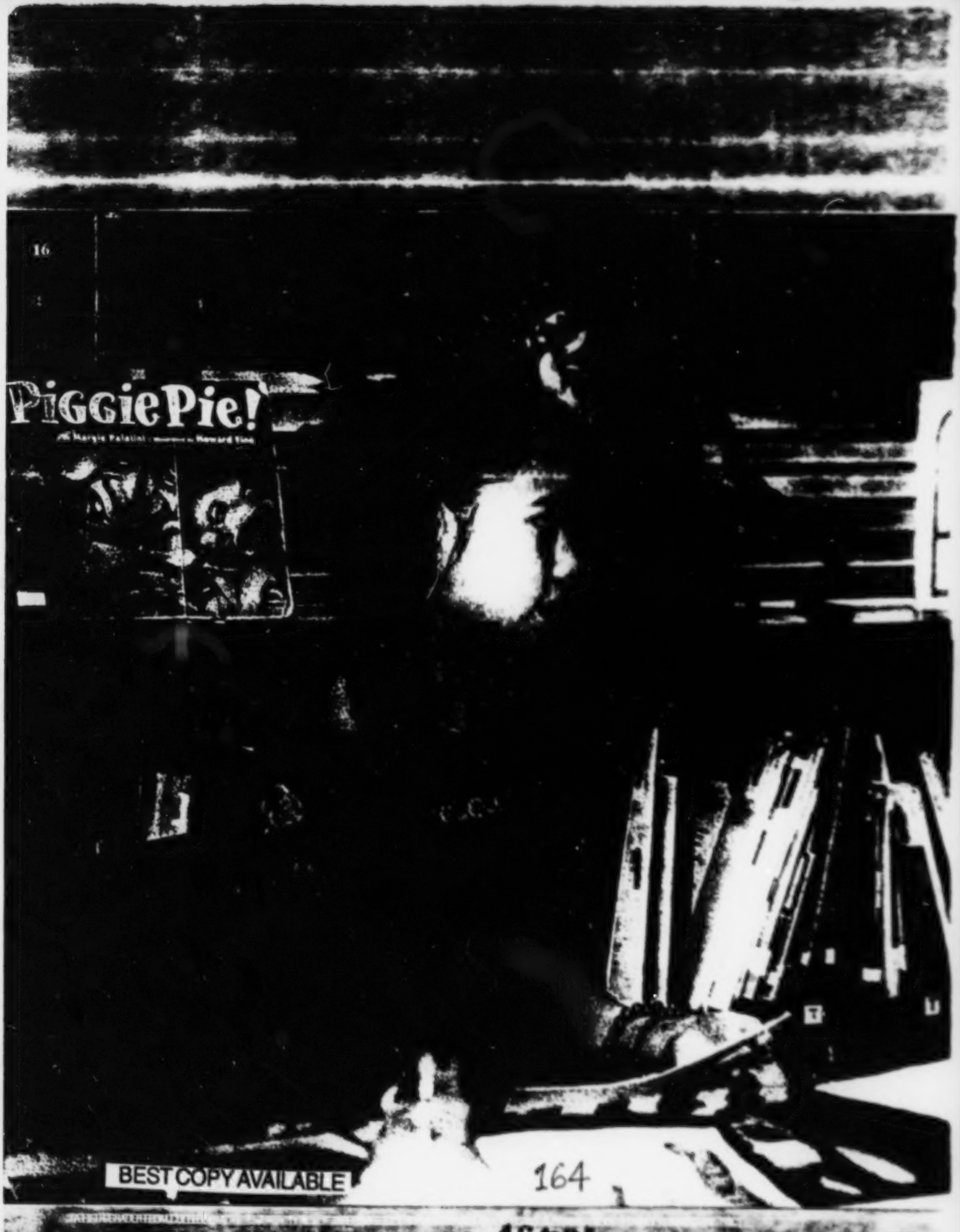
"**If** we can grow with the school system and get heritage language curriculum into the high schools, we'd be really happy. In 10 years our hope is to have 300 fluent speakers coming out of the schools."

community. "These kids already have a lot of challenges, and then at age 12, to pull them away from the school and community they've known all their lives and to put them in a strange environment with a mix of other cultures, with teachers and children they don't know, that's very hard."

There are good reasons for concern. Out of 100 students who started first grade at Warm Springs Elementary in 1986, only 12 graduated from Madras High School last spring. "We're able to retain them in grades five and six," says Quaid, "but by grades seven and eight the dropout rate is drastic." Quaid supports a plan, once the new elementary school is built, to convert the old school into a middle school. This will allow Warm Springs students the option of staying on the reservation through grade eight.

The lack of Native American teachers is another concern. Smith remains one of only two certified Native American staff at the school. "The Warm Springs people have struggled to produce their own teachers, and that's been a problem for a long, long time," says Smith. "But now the tribes have a teacher education partnership with Eastern Oregon State University. Right now I've got a college student coming once a week, and next year she'll do her practicum here. Another Warm Springs teacher graduated from Arizona State last year, but I didn't have an opening so she went to the middle school in Madras."

That Smith can casually mention she didn't have a job opening last year indicates just how far Warm Springs has come. If pressed to name the one thing most responsible for turning the school around, Smith would say it's been her staff. Her staff would say it's been the principal. Smith speaks for both sides when she says, "If it weren't for the people here, willing to sacrifice and to change the way they're doing things, to try something new, we'd never be where we are." ■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Piggie Pie!
by Margie Palatini illustrated by Howard Fine

On the road to Oz

WITH SMARTS, HEART, AND COURAGE, EDMONDS EDUCATORS TEAM UP AND JOURNEY AHEAD

Story and photos by JOYCE RIHA LINIK

Pam Hopkins

> *"But it is a long way to the Emerald City, and it will take you many days. The country here is rich and pleasant, but you must pass through rough and dangerous places before you reach the end of your journey."*
>
> —L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*

EDMONDS, Washington—In the aftermath of a whirlwind teachers' strike in the late 1980s, educators in the Edmonds School District found themselves walking a difficult and unfamiliar road. In addition to the adjustment to decentralization, teachers were being whisked into the technology revolution and the standards movement. They faced the steady onslaught of new concepts, strategies, and skills that teachers must stay abreast of while providing continuity in their classrooms.

Their journey has not been unlike that of Dorothy and her companions on the road to Oz. Before goals can be reached, there are gullies to cross, rivers to ford, and

PHOTO BELOW: SALLY HARRISON, WHO DRAWS ON 27 YEARS OF CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE, IS THE TEACHERS' TEACHER IN THE EDMONDS SCHOOL DISTRICT

strange beasts to confront (lest we forget the Winged Monkeys). But, like the beloved characters in the Frank Baum classic, dedicated educators forge ahead, keeping sight of worthy objectives and working together to solve problems. Never mind that there is no wizard, no shortcut, no easy answer. To them, the goal is worth the effort, the journey is an opportunity to learn. And so, forward they march.

And they're making progress. So much so that the U.S. Department of Education named the Edmonds School District as a winner in the 1999 National Awards Program for Model Professional Development. Edmonds, one of only seven winners, was recognized for outstanding efforts to improve teachers' knowledge and skills, and raise student achievement. Located north of Seattle amidst towering fir trees, coffeehouses, and Northwest urban sprawl, Edmonds has become a place where teachers team up and pool resources to gain ground.

"How can I get there?" asked Dorothy.

"You must walk. It is a long journey, through a country that is sometimes pleasant and sometimes dark and terrible. However, I will use all the magic arts I know of to keep you from harm."

She's not wearing a pointed hat or sitting on a throne of rubies. There's no magic wand in sight. Still, Sally Harrison is undoubtedly the "Good Witch" of Edmonds, helping teachers throughout the district to find their way. Now in her 27th year of teaching, the last eight with the district office, Harrison is Executive Director for Teaching and Learning in the Edmonds School District. Around here, she's the teachers' teacher.

Since the U.S. Department of Education award, Harrison says, the phone has been ringing off the hook with educators wanting to know Edmonds' secret. "'What's the model?' they ask."

The funny thing is, there is no model.

"'Model' just doesn't fit what we do," Harrison says. "It's really not a model. It's a way of thinking, a way of working together."

Outsiders, it seems, don't like this answer. Many are looking for a quick fix, an easy-to-follow recipe that they can take home and replicate.

It's not that simple.

On any given day, Edmonds might be doing all sorts of things in the area of professional development —one site visit, one advisory board meeting, two workshops on curriculum mapping, one class on writing assessment. But observers who note these activities may miss that the *how* is as important as the *what*.

Harrison believes it's crucial to keep sight of the bigger picture. "The priority," she says, "is to provide high-quality instruction for kids. What needs to be included in learning opportunities for teachers keeps evolving. The objective is to increase individual and team or collaborative wisdom, and that can be accomplished in a lot of ways."

Over time, Edmonds has developed an interactive approach to professional development that can accommodate evolving content. "Heuristic" is an apt label, meaning that learning takes place through investigations and discoveries.

At the heart of this approach is a deep-seated respect for teachers and an emphasis on building strong relationships and solid, straightforward communication. Those at the district level view teachers and principals as capable professionals and value their input. Several advisory committees have been formed through which teachers have a voice in district decisions. Site visits have evolved from obligatory drop-bys with little communication to visitations that include all stakeholders, including parents and students, and candid discussions regarding both progress and challenges.

The district's philosophical commitment to professional development is backed up by real dollars. Edmonds invests 6 percent of its budget on professional development —about six times the national average, according to the National Staff Development Council. For the Teaching and Learning Division that Harrison heads, that means an annual budget of about $1.5 million for professional development from the district. Last year, her program also received $972,000 in grants that focused on professional development. The consistent funding base, Harrison says, shows that the district "has established a priority to support the change to a standards-referenced school system."

Harrison is in constant communication with educators throughout the district and spends her two-hour commute from Snohomish listening and responding to voice-mail messages. She is constantly asking teachers, "What do you want to learn and how do you want to learn it?" and "How did you learn that and how do we replicate it?"

Teachers play an integral part in planning their own professional development. And this involvement yields more than the obvious benefits. Of course, teachers acquire new knowledge and skills in development activities. But, in determining what sort of professional development would be helpful, they improve their ability to analyze their students' needs and their own needs as their students' teachers.

It's no surprise that teachers already pressed for time might say, "Just tell us what to do." But Harrison believes it's imperative for teachers to learn how to identify their own, as well as their students', needs. "It's like teaching your children to dress," says the mother of two. "Although it would be easier to do it yourself, they need to learn to dress themselves."

Participation builds a sense of ownership in the process, an element Harrison believes is necessary for the process to thrive long term, even with inevitable changes in personnel.

"It's important that they understand what they are doing and that it's *their* work. If the culture is strong enough," she says, "the work will go on as it should."

"Well," he said, with a sigh. "I'm not much of a magician, as I said; but if you will come to me tomorrow morning, I will stuff your head with brains. I cannot tell you how to use them, however, you must find that out for yourself."

So what does this professional development work look like?

Of course, there are the traditional workshops and seminars. There's a mentoring program for new teachers that involves training for the mentors as well as the neophytes. A wealth of written resources is readily available to teachers via newsletters, Web sites, recommended reading lists, and research summaries. In fact, one of the first projects Harrison and her staff undertook when embarking on this journey was a research project investigating best practices for professional development. Their findings were published in an 82-page research synthesis, cowritten by teachers and district personnel. (See In the Library, Page 40.)

But perhaps the most effective professional development strategy has involved the creation of "teacher leaders" and, later, "learning teams" throughout the district, an example of the evolution Harrison describes.

After decentralization, the district lost its central staff development office. Teachers—busy with day-to-day operations—realized that they had little time for keeping abreast of educational issues or planning ongoing education. They needed some support. In particular, a number of teachers—particularly at the elementary level—were unhappy with the mathematics textbooks they were using and wanted help finding a better way to teach math.

In 1991, Darlene Atik, then a Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA), suggested that the district apply for grant funding for training to restructure math instruction. An application written by teacher leaders and a grant writer landed Edmonds a National Science Foundation matching grant worth more than $1.6 million over five years. The project enabled the district to train a cadre of teacher leaders in a summer institute with outside math consultants. These teacher leaders then shared their learning with colleagues throughout the district. To support the effort over time, the teacher leaders attended regular meetings throughout the school year to further their training and discuss implementation issues. In the beginning, only a handful of schools opted to participate, though there was interest in rolling out the program throughout the district over subsequent years.

For teachers participating in the program, the experience was nothing short of profound. The workshop was far from another dry lecture or preachy sermon. Instead of listening to someone drone on about how to teach math, teachers were given the chance to be students themselves. They experienced learning math in a new way. Many self-confessed "math haters" had a revelation: they loved math.

Susan Ardissono, then a third-grade teacher at Evergreen Elementary, was one of them.

"Prior to that experience, I was math phobic, and I came to see how talented I was in math," Ardissono says. "I remember one 'Aha!' came when we were learning about multiplication. We were cutting out little triangles when—wham!—I finally realized what square numbers were. It made me sit up and take notice. If kids don't get it, we need to give them hands-on learning experiences. It changed my understanding of how kids learn. It changed the way I teach."

Other teachers recount similar bolts from the blue. In becoming students again, teachers were better able to understand what their students require in order to learn. What happened in those initial math trainings became infectious as teachers began to approach teaching all subjects differently.

As the process evolved and was fine-tuned, teacher leaders became known as learning teams. Regardless of nomenclature, however, the concept remains essentially the same: Take a small group of teachers, provide them with an intense

PHOTO BELOW: [illegible]

learning experience, ask them to take their learning back to share with other staff members, and support them all as they experiment in the classroom and continue to share their learning with each other.

An important aspect of this kind of training is what Harrison calls "watercooler learning." One of the richest things teachers have to share is their own experience. When teachers have the opportunity to share their own stories, they learn from each other and grow collectively.

Today, every school in the district relies on learning teams for staff development. Many even have multiple teams in different areas.

The four travelers passed through the rest of the forest in safety, and when they came out from its gloom saw before them a steep hill, covered from top to bottom with great pieces of rock.

"That will be a hard climb," said the Scarecrow, "but we must get over the hill, nevertheless."

So he led the way and the others followed.

With a high population of English-language learners and a mobility rate of 40 percent, College Place Elementary is one of the most socioeconomically challenged schools in the district. Even so, it is a school where professional development efforts—specifically, learning teams—are making a visible difference in student performance. While grade-level test scores still have room to grow, the rate of improvement in recent years has been impressive. "We've come a long way," says Principal Sue Venable.

Four years ago, College Place began working with a staff learning team. The first year was devoted to the district math project. The next year, the learning team turned the focus to the complexities of instituting state standards. A three-day summer seminar provided an intensive introduction to the subject.

"It was the first time I was exposed to what it really means to have a standards-based system," says sixth-grade teacher Emily Lauderback, "and what elements are crucial to make it work." They tackled such topics as standards, instruction and assessment, student learning, and reflection. The training, she says, "really helped us buy into the standards movement. We could see how phenomenal it would be for the kids."

As the team came to understand what was necessary to make standards work, and as they examined current practices at College Place Elementary, they came up with recommendations for some big shifts in the classroom. Among these were aligning the curriculum and developing appropriate assessments. To assist them in this endeavor, two more learning teams were formed, one specializing in literacy and one in math.

In addition to their work on alignment and assessment, the teams learned to analyze test data and identify areas where instruction needed improvement, then make recommendations for change. For example, to address the unique needs of their students who are learning English, the literacy team recommended that the staff make a shift in reading instruction, adopting a flexible grouping approach where smaller groups of students would receive more intense instruction with the help of both teachers and educational assistants. The rest of the staff agreed.

Today, both reading scores and teacher observations provide evidence of success.

Kathleen Seymour, a first-grade teacher, says, "I've already had to retool my program since the kids are so much further ahead this year than last."

Meanwhile, the original learning team has continued its focus on whole-school issues such as developing a portfolio system to chronicle student progress and help with assessment. These portfolios stay with children throughout their years at CPE, providing tangible evidence of improvement.

Without a doubt, CPE teamwork has helped to create a more cohesive and effective staff.

"Communication is so strong, not just at grade level, but throughout the school," says teacher Taylor Frazier. "We're a team."

"I am terribly afraid of falling, myself," said the Cowardly Lion, "but I suppose there is nothing to do but try it. So get on my back and we will make the attempt."

The added time and weight of all this training and development can take a toll.

"Teachers have gotten smarter and are using their time more effectively," says Harrison, "but they're also working longer days."

The district compensates teachers at an hourly rate for after-school

PHOTO BELOW: [illegible] A TEACHER ON SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT AT THE DISTRICT [illegible] LISTENS TO A STUDENT PRESENT HER [illegible] DURING A SITE VISIT TO COLLEGE PLACE ELEMENTARY

workshops and provides a small stipend for teachers participating in learning teams. "We recognize how hard it is for teachers at the end of the day," says Harrison. "If there's something we want teachers to participate in, we budget for that."

Teacher Nancy Williams says she often takes advantage of after-school training to improve her practice. She also says that receiving compensation for this time is a nice bonus. "I came from a district where they didn't pay us for this time. Here, they're showing me that they value my time enough to pay me."

Yet, the compensation is small compared to the weight of the task. "All that planning takes a lot of extra time," says Lauderback, "and that can be difficult. Plus, there are the challenges that come along with reform."

Because the standards system is still relatively new, and even states and districts continue ironing out the wrinkles, confusion at the school level can sometimes be dizzying. Lauderback, for example, talks about the ambiguity of some specific grade-level standards and tasks, as well as the challenge of documenting student achievement in areas that are less than clearly defined. She and her colleagues call their Teacher on Special Assignment at the district and try to hash out some of the discrepancies. But while they're attempting to make sense of these puzzles, a dozen more come hurtling their way.

So where does the motivation come from?

"I already see that it's benefiting the kids," says Lauderback. "I see them learning about themselves as learners, and I'm willing to do whatever I can to make that happen."

Other teachers express similar sentiments. After all, helping kids learn is why they chose this profession in the first place.

"The district has provided me with more professional development than I certainly ever got in my certification program," Lauderback says, "and I feel very fortunate to be in this district because of that."

But traveling this yellow brick road is both "rich and pleasant" and "rough and dangerous."

"On one hand," Lauderback says, "I feel empowered in my classroom and school. On the other, I wish the district could provide even more help and more resources."

Lauderback ponders that it might be easier if materials were "finished" at the district level before heading for the classroom. But at the same time, she sees that teacher input and classroom experimentation is necessary to finish the work. In short, she observes, "the reform is ongoing and will never be done."

This state of flux can be agonizing to those who might like to wrap up their training and then get on with their job.

The truth is, professional development in the Edmonds district is job-embedded, and that's one of the underlying lessons Harrison has been attempting to impart. In training new teachers, Harrison describes what a "system" is—for example, the human immune system—and notes that change and challenge and frustration are not necessarily bad things, but natural occurrences in a working system. "We're always working to improve," says Harrison.

The irony is, over the past several years, educators have been working to teach students to value the process as much as the end result. Portfolios, for example, include early drafts as important to charting progress as that all-important final essay. The lesson that teachers are now learning is the same. The journey is as important as the goal.

It's not without difficulty, but this ideological shift is visible in Edmonds.

"When I stop learning, it's time for me to stop teaching," Lauderback says. "We can always improve our practice."

"Your Silver Shoes will carry you over the desert," replied Glinda. "If you had known their power you could have gone back to your Aunt Em the very first day you came to this country."

"But then I should not have had my wonderful brains!" cried the Scarecrow. "I might have passed my whole life in the farmer's cornfield."

"And I should not have had my lovely heart," said the Tin Woodman. "I might have stood and rusted in the forest till the end of the world."

"And I should have lived a coward forever," declared the Lion, "and no beast in all the forest would have had a good word to say to me." ■

WHERE GOOD IDEAS TRAVEL

In northern Idaho, a school district turns to its own experts to improve the quality of teaching

story and photos by SUZIE BOSS

COEUR D'ALENE, [illegible]

When the sun shines on the Idaho panhandle, Lake Coeur d'Alene sparkles and shimmers, throwing off reflections of pine-covered slopes. If you pause to ponder this awesome scenery, you'll discover a story that begins in the last Ice Age. Study the mountains and big waters, and you'll learn how glaciers carved the hills and basins of today's Inland Northwest. Without taking time to reflect, however, it's all too easy to notice the scenery but overlook the bigger story behind it.

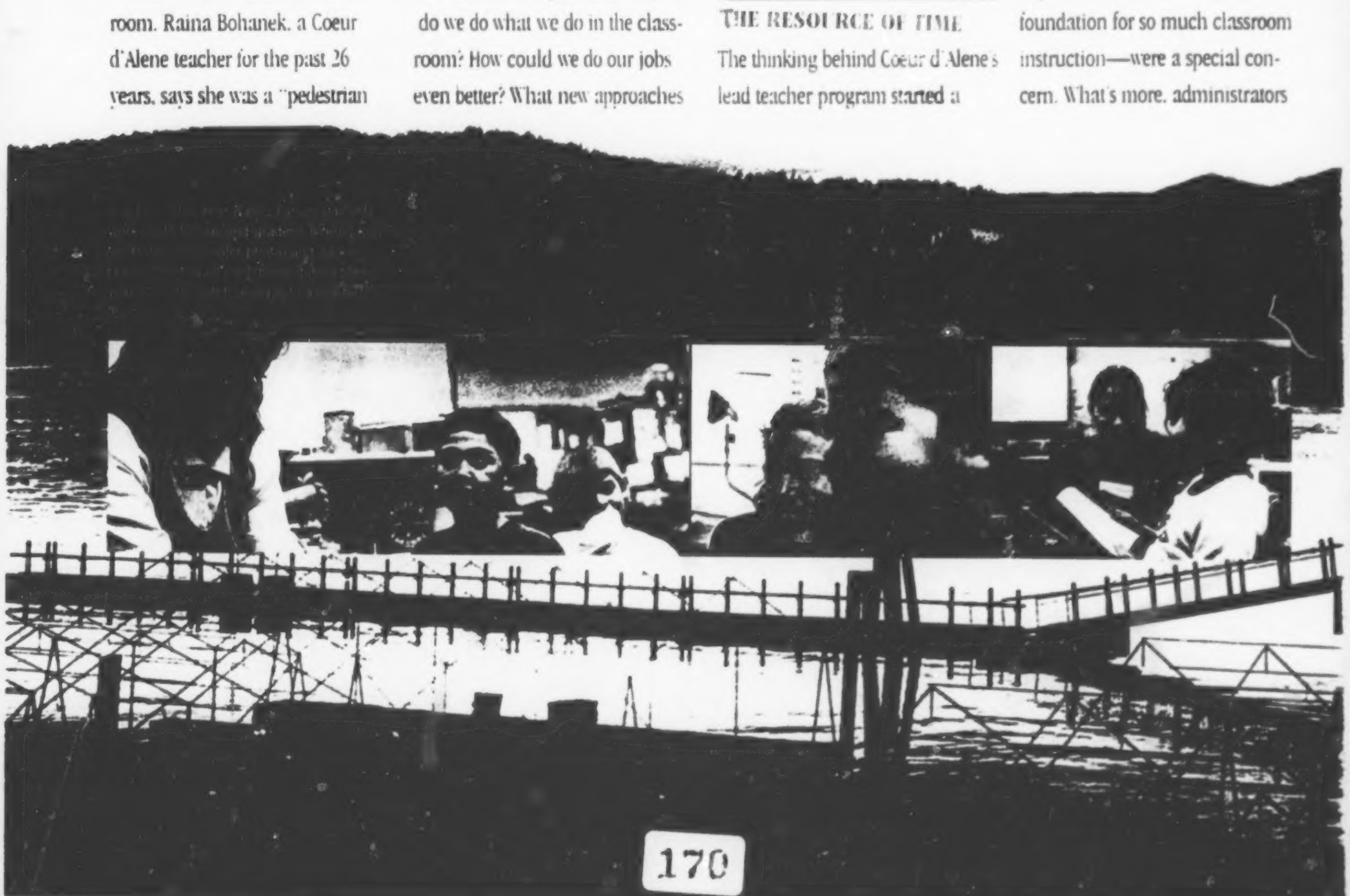
The same holds true in the classroom. Raina Bohanek, a Coeur d'Alene teacher for the past 26 years, says she was a "pedestrian teacher" her first few years on the job. "I was wandering around, seeing the sights, but I didn't really know what I was seeing and why it was important," she says.

Today, Bohanek is one of nine exceptional teachers who are the linchpins of an innovative approach to professional development in the Coeur d'Alene School District. For these lead teachers—one from each elementary school in the 9,200-student district—reflection comes as naturally as breathing. They constantly pepper themselves with questions: Why do we do what we do in the classroom? How could we do our jobs even better? What new approaches could help our students learn?

Such questions are nothing new to the profession of teaching. What's new is the extra time that's been carved out of the daily routine so that all elementary teachers—from rookie interns to polished veterans, from those working in high-poverty schools to those working with affluent populations—have ongoing opportunities to pose and answer questions among themselves. "You can't be reflective," observes a lead teacher named Char Soucy, "if you don't have time to think."

THE RESOURCE OF TIME

The thinking behind Coeur d'Alene's lead teacher program started a couple years before the official launch in 1998. Pam Pratt, Principal at Fernan Elementary, Patti Perry, first-grade teacher at Fernan, and Hazel Bauman, Director of Curriculum and Instruction for the district, wanted to better serve the students most at risk of not succeeding in school. They noticed that many children from low-income families had to move during the school year. Settling into a new school, with a new teacher, became another risk factor in young lives already disrupted at home. Reading and other literacy skills—the foundation for so much classroom instruction—were a special concern. What's more, administrators



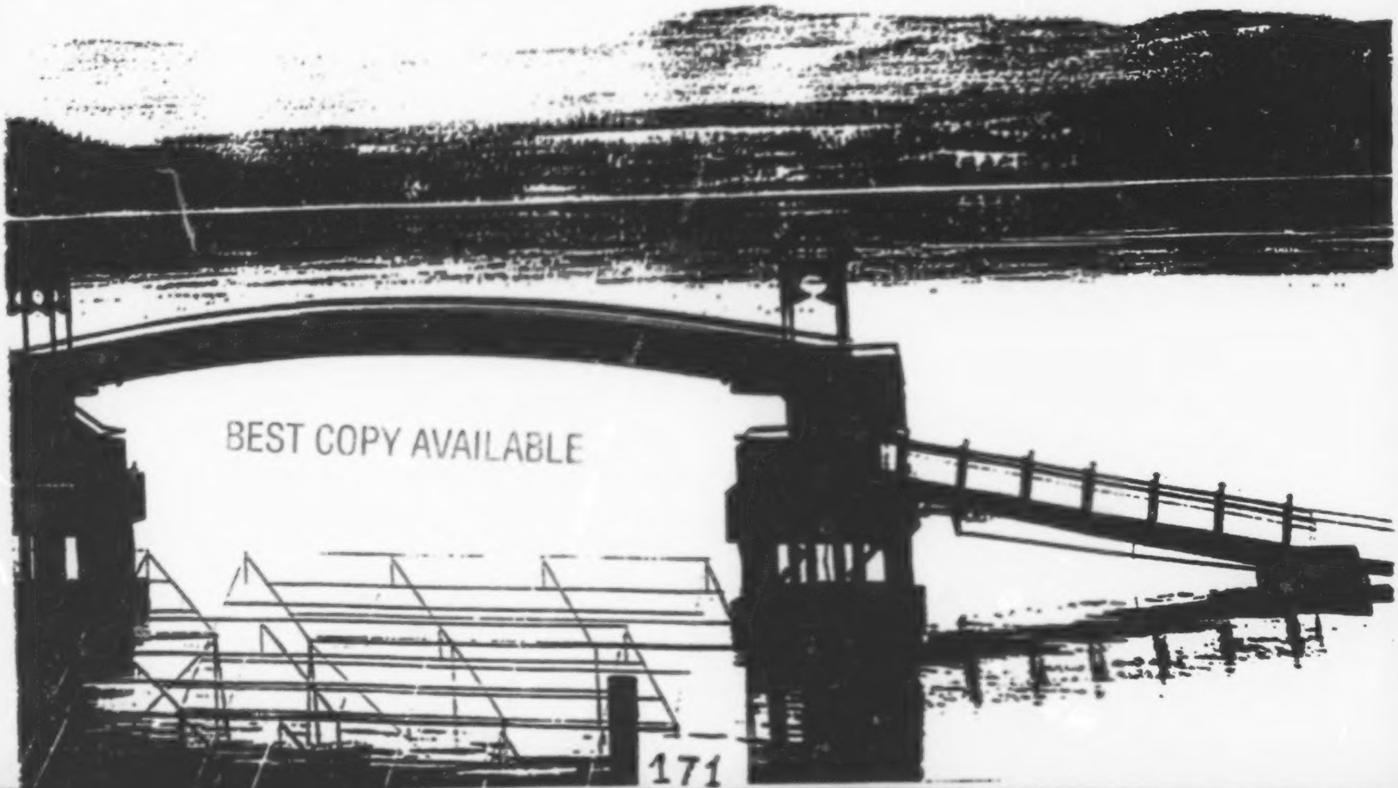
worried about the number of new teachers who were either unprepared for the challenges of teaching at-risk children, or who were burning out after just a few years on the job.

Rather than seeking an outside solution, the district turned to its own in-house teaching experts. "We knew we had pockets of knowledge and expertise in our own district," says Bauman. "And we knew that teachers have great credibility with other teachers, because they're in the classroom every day. They know what works. And teaching is their passion. We wanted to find a way to share that knowledge, so that classroom practices would be more effective and consistent throughout the district."

With a three-year literacy grant from the Albertson Foundation, the district has found a way to make staff training more ongoing, intensive, and multifaceted. Every elementary school now has a lead teacher, chosen through a rigorous application process, who is available to help her colleagues develop new skills in language arts. To allow time for that growth to happen, lead teachers are paired with interns who can cover the classroom for part of the day, giving the leads time to consult with colleagues, model a lesson, or observe what's happening in other classrooms. The interns aren't student teachers: they're fully certified, although they've never had responsibility for their own classrooms before. Being matched with a lead teacher for a year gives these rookies a chance to learn the ropes from a master practitioner. But the learning isn't all one-sided. Being in the lead teacher position turns out to be a powerful learning opportunity as well.

When her second-graders start trickling into the classroom to launch another day at Hayden Meadows Elementary School, Judy Bieze is ready. She makes the rounds as students hang up jackets and settle into chairs. She hears about one girl's birthday party and another's new baby brother. With a touch on a shoulder here, a pat on the back there, and quick smiles all around, she starts them on a warm-up math problem to get them thinking.

As soon as the pencils are busy, Bieze is out the door, turning the room over to her intern. Bieze stakes out a quiet corner in the staff lounge to work one-on-one with a student from another second-grade class. The girl's teacher is puzzled about why she's struggling. By doing an individual assessment, Bieze hopes to learn enough information to explain



why the girl is getting stuck, and suggest some teaching strategies to help her move forward.

Almost 20 years after she started teaching, Bieze, 51, stays interested in her work by "learning new ways to help my kids." Last year's Teacher of the Year for the state of Idaho, Bieze considers teaching an opportunity for lifelong learning. (As part of the National Teacher of the Year Program, sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers and Scholastic Inc., each state education agency selects a Teacher of the Year who is exceptionally dedicated, knowledgeable, and skilled at helping all students learn.) The turning points in Bieze's career have come about when she has bumped into a new concept or wrestled with an unexpected challenge. Early in her career, for example, she learned about the Reading Recovery method for helping struggling students succeed in reading. "That moved me off where I sat," she says. "It opened my mind to change, and I have pursued it ever since."

The lead teacher program "is a way to nudge people off the status quo," Bieze says. "We're providing opportunities to help people move off base—if they're ready."

Lead teachers use all sorts of methods to nudge their colleagues into considering new ideas for the classroom. They might meet in small groups before or after school to debrief after a workshop or talk about a particular concern. If a teacher asks for individual help, the lead teacher might do an assessment to better guide instruction, or model a word-study lesson, or cover the other teacher's class so she can go observe an effective practice in another school. Often, the leads pass along good resources or research they have gleaned from meeting with other lead teachers.

The leads don't model one right way to teach. "We all have different styles," acknowledges Bieze, as unique as the decorations on their walls, the cadence of their voices, and the facial expressions that let children know when they've done something wonderful. But they do share a view of education that puts the child first. "When I was in school back in the '50s," Bieze recalls, "you plugged the child into your framework. Today, we lead from the child—what he knows and can do." When a child isn't succeeding, that means the teacher needs to try a different method to help him learn. "You need a marriage between personal style as a teacher and the individual needs of the learner," Bieze says.

Principal Pam Pratt credits the program's success to the lead teachers' diplomacy, people skills, and patience. "They wait for the right moment to suggest ideas," she says. "They aren't pushy. They know how to honor their colleagues." Not only are lead teachers expert at working with children, adds administrator Hazel Bauman, "but they know how to teach adults."

Classroom change hasn't been sudden or sweeping since the lead teacher program started. Instead, it evolves one little step at a time. "Teachers might pick up a nugget from talking to me," explains Bieze. "They'll get one new little piece, take it back to their classroom, and try it out. They might come back to me with more questions, then go try it again. Improvement is a process. I know," she says with a grin, "because I do the same thing myself."

One young teacher praises Bieze for always framing her feedback in a positive way, "even if I'm doing something wrong." That takes some of the risk out of asking for help or leading a lesson in a different way.

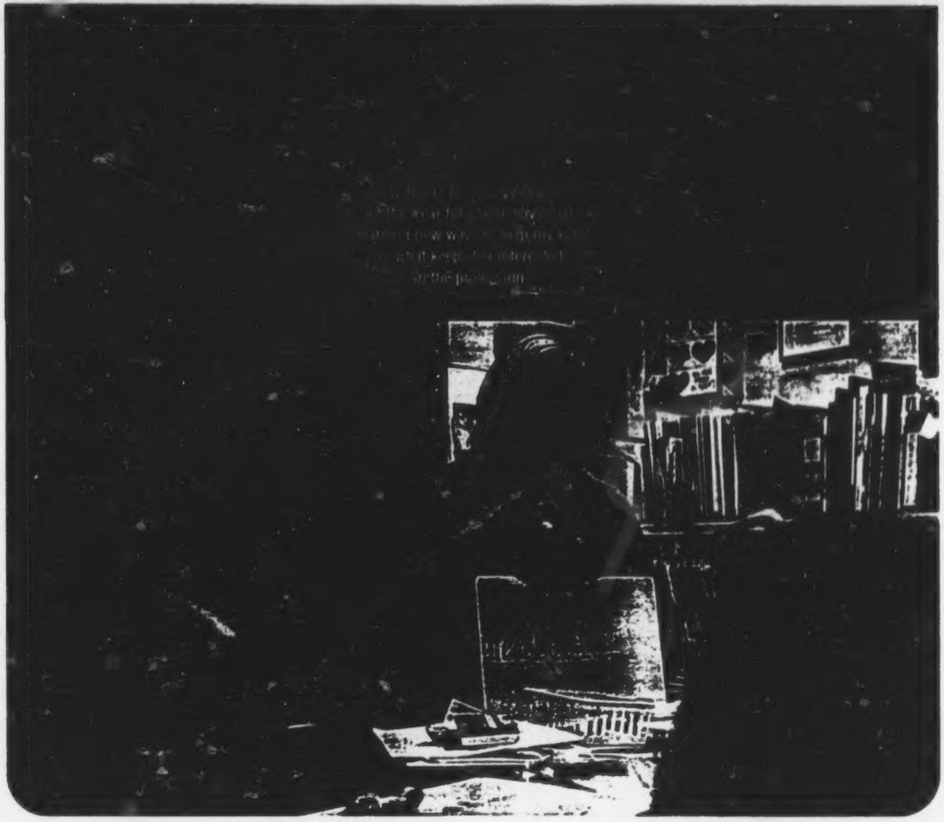
Of course, some teachers are more open than others to considering new ideas. Lead teachers work hard to keep their relationships with other teachers collegial. "We're not here to evaluate," Bieze stresses. "That's not part of our job, and we've tried to make that clear from the beginning." The leads don't carry tales back to the principal, don't file teacher evaluations with the front office, don't step into supervisors' shoes. "And it needs to stay that way," Bieze says, "so other teachers will feel comfortable chatting with us."

Still, some teachers hesitate even to consider an approach that might upset their familiar applecart. "We do have some reluctant teachers," admits Raina Bohanek, "and they present our most difficult hurdle. I don't want to force my way into their classrooms. But when I see someone struggling, and I have ideas of how to help, based on research and experience, it's hard. Why are some so willing to learn, and others resist it?" In her own journey as a teacher, Bohanek recalls specific experiences with the right mix of school climate, collegiality, support, and information that helped her learn and grow. "If you're tuned in, those opportunities can open a new path for you as a teacher," she says.

HOW IDEAS TRAVEL

Before Char Soucy became a first-grade teacher in Coeur d'Alene four years ago, she taught in an outdoor-education program in upstate New York. She still fits the part, with wavy hair falling to her waist, a singing voice that would sound great around a campfire, and a passion for hands-on, experiential learning.

As the lead teacher at Fernan Ele-



mentary, Soucy, 36, doesn't try to push her ideas about education onto her colleagues. "People have to be ready to learn," she believes, "and they'll only learn something new if they have a need to learn it." Typically, she waits for other teachers to ask for help rather than interjecting herself into their classrooms.

A staff development program that's based at the school level means that teachers can learn new teaching practices right in their own classrooms, with their own students and materials, during the regular school day. It's the opposite of training workshops that pull teachers away from their kids and classrooms. "People tend to learn from what they see, what they observe," Soucy says. "This program gives teachers a chance to see good ideas in action. Great ideas travel that way."

Soucy herself is always on the lookout for great ideas that will advance her own classroom skills, whether it's integrating technology into a first-grade classroom, or finding new ways to connect brain processes with whole-body movement. She watches more experienced teachers for clues and ideas. The teachers she "worships," she says, "are never satisfied. They're always improving, always adding more tools to their toolbox. A good teacher is an ardent learner."

Nancy Larsen is a perfect example. Before she started teaching, Larsen, 43, spent a dozen years as a full-time mom, volunteering in her two daughters' classes and activities. Ever since she started her professional career nine years ago, she's been stretching herself, reaching for new challenges that will make her a better teacher. It's paid off: Larsen has been recognized as Idaho's Teacher of the Year for 2000.

"If I don't do something new every two or three years, I become stagnant," Larsen says in the same soft, calm voice that holds the attention of her second-graders at Ramsey Elementary. After her first few years in the classroom, she went back to earn a master's degree. Then she started teaching literacy classes as an adjunct professor at the University of Idaho campus in Coeur d'Alene, working with education students "who are where I was just a few years ago." She devoted one summer to an intensive teacher-as-writer seminar sponsored by the Northwest Inland Writing Project, an experience that has shaped how she teaches language arts. Last year, both Larsen and fellow Coeur d'Alene teacher Judy Bieze went through the difficult process of earning certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, a process "that asks you to examine everything you do in the classroom," Larsen says. (See sidebar, Page 26.)

The lead teacher program immediately appealed to Larsen as "a learning opportunity for myself. The chance to get together with talented people throughout the district and discuss what we're doing in the classroom—that sounded powerful." As the program has evolved, Larsen has realized that it goes well beyond professional development. "It *builds professionalism* in teaching," she emphasizes. "We can do so much more when we reach out and build connections with other teachers."

MUTUAL ADMIRATION

Barbara Howe, 43, is brand-new to teaching, "but it's what I've wanted to do since I was a child," she says. As she leads her second-graders in a discussion about maps, asking about their personal travels to build understanding, she hardly seems like a rookie. It helps, she admits, that lead teacher Larsen is perched on a desk just outside the student circle, listening and observing. "To have someone right there with you, guiding and coaching you—it would be so overwhelming other-

RAISING THE BAR

or more than a decade, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) has been raising the bar for what teachers should know and be able to do in the classroom. Established after the landmark 1986 Carnegie report *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*, the National Board is an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that aims to improve student learning by strengthening teaching.

The board's rigorous national certification process asks teachers to reflect on their own performance and skills. Teachers submit portfolios, student work samples, videotapes, and analyses of their classroom teaching and student learning. More than 4,800 teachers have successfully completed the grueling, yearlong application process so far, earning praise from President Clinton for "being challenged to fulfill their greatest potential."

Who are they? Nationally certified teachers average 15 years in the classroom. More than half have earned master's degrees, and 2 percent have doctorates. Although 95 percent teach in public schools, they are well dispersed geographically, with 29 percent teaching in rural schools, 32 percent urban, and 39 percent suburban.

North Carolina and Ohio lead the nation in the number of nationally certified teachers. In the Northwest, Idaho has emerged as a regional leader, with 88 nationally certified teachers by the end of 1999, according to the NBPTS. Washington follows with 23; Montana, 12; Alaska, 10. So far, Oregon has no nationally certified teachers, although 34 of the state's teachers are currently pursuing certification, according to a recent story in *The Oregonian*.

Why the disparity from state to state? A key factor seems to be the amount of support states offer their teachers to pursue certification. In Idaho, for example, candidates receive assistance with the $2,000 application fee from both the state and the Albertson Foundation. Successful candidates in Idaho also receive a $2,000 per year salary boost for five years.

Teachers who have pursued certification stress the intangible rewards that the application process brings. Barbara Kelley, past chair of the NBPTS, said the application process "requires intense self-reflection and analysis of one's practice, and has proven to be a terrific professional development experience."

Judy Bieze, Idaho's Teacher of the Year for 1999, earned national certification last year, nearly 20 years into her teaching career. The process confirmed her sound classroom practices in most areas, and helped her stretch in her teaching of science. "In science, the goal is to teach to the big ideas. Going through certification helped me think about what that means and how I can improve." What's more, Bieze says, earning the certificate is affirming to good teachers. "Teachers today do a better job than we've ever done even though many of the kids are more challenging to teach, the dynamics of families are different, and what's expected of us keeps expanding. We're on the right track, and national certification is a way to say that."

wise," Howe says. "And to have someone of Nancy's caliber to learn from—she makes it look so easy."

Mentoring may be the official term for how the lead teachers help the interns, but it doesn't begin to capture all that transpires through these one-on-one relationships. The lead teacher acts as cheerleader, coach, counselor, critical friend, and more. The intern grows from novice into colleague, becoming another set of eyes on the children's learning, another voice in classroom discussions. Most of the carefully matched lead-intern pairs evolve into mutual admiration societies over the course of the school year.

Intern Kristen Hutchison, 26, admits she follows lead teacher Bieze around "like a puppy. We eat lunch together. I'm always asking her questions, and she's always sharing ideas with me, planting seeds." Bieze's steady tutelage has boosted Hutchison's confidence. Still, the intern worries that "there's so much on you as a teacher. I'm always asking myself, can I do it? Can I be what the kids need?" No matter how busy she is, Bieze manages to find time to address her intern's concerns. Hutchison says, "whether it takes five minutes or an hour. She's so good to me."

Bieze, in turn, loves the rookie's energy and appreciates that sparkle in her eye that reflects a keen interest in children. "Without these opportunities for mentoring, we lose too many of our best and brightest," says the veteran.

Although the interns learn plenty about the nuts and bolts of leading a classroom, they also pick up some of the nuances of the profession: how to pace themselves; how to frame the day, then reframe it on the fly if the kids seem overwhelmed by lunchtime; how to pull apart "the why" of things; when to reach for the phone to call a child's parent. "These are sophisticated subtleties I was never aware of my first years on the job," Bieze admits.

Bohanek also coaches her interns to strike a balance between life and work, home and school. "You've got to take care of yourself and keep this job in perspective," she says. "And it's healthy for the interns to see us struggle. I struggle every day," she admits. "All my lessons are not taught as well as I'd like. But how do I fix the mess? That's real life, and it's good for them to see that we struggle with these things, too," she says.

MAKING IT LAST

With less than a year remaining on the grant that has made this program possible, the Coeur d'Alene district is hoping to find a way to keep its innovative professional development concept alive. Without outside financial support, the district probably won't be able to afford to hire interns, suspects Bauman, even though the program has been a boon for recruiting good teachers. More than 90 percent of previous interns have been hired by the district, she says, "and they are so well prepared to teach. They really hit the ground running." Student achievement is also up in the district, reflected by improving scores on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills.

What won't end anytime soon is a commitment to drawing on the district's own talent for staff development. "It's honoring for our staff when we say that we have knowledge here. Some of our best resources are our own folks," says Principal Pratt. A new state law requires teachers to pass a reading course for recertification, and the district is exploring having lead teachers serve as instructors.

Even without the intern component of the program, the district hopes to continue to support lead teachers. "To identify someone in every building with expertise and passion about teaching language arts, and have that person network with her colleagues, is a powerful model," says Bauman. If money were no object, she would like to introduce the same approach for math, then expand the lead teacher concept into the secondary level. In whatever form the program survives, she says, "I hope we can retain the same flavor."

The teachers themselves have enjoyed networking too much to let it stop with the grant. "This program has changed the perception of whether a teacher can open her classroom door and ask a colleague a question," observes Bieze. "That won't change. We will continue to raise inquiries, to create opportunities to dialogue, to look for answers, to work together collegially."

Adds Bohanek, "We may not have the same luxury of time for staff development in the future, but I don't see us going backwards. It's too good for us as teachers, and it's good for kids. We'll keep putting our energy into people and practices." ■

Laurelhurst School Substitute

[illegible] (at right and bottom left) coaches students to be keen observers. Teacher Rebecca Erickson (top left) dives into the hands-on activity along with her fourth-grade students (center photos, left).

SPREADING THE WORD

PORTLAND, Oregon— The chairs were hard, with no cushions. Desks were too small for spreading out papers. There wasn't even a window for framing daydreams or catching a breeze. But when the 47 teachers who shared this space for a week last August describe the experience, they use such words as "magical," "inspiring," "awesome." For that one week, they weren't teachers separated by classroom walls or grade levels. They were a community, drawn together to focus on writing.

For the past three years, Community of Writers (COW), a sponsored project of the nonprofit Portland Public Schools Foundation, has been creating opportunities for teachers to connect with their peers, draw inspiration from professional writers, and develop new skills for teaching their students how to write. Improving teachers' classroom practices is a step toward a bigger goal: improv-

TEACHERS COME TOGETHER FOR A CHANCE TO IMPROVE THEIR OWN WRITING, THEN DISCOVER SOMETHING EVEN BETTER: A COMMUNITY THAT CARES

Story and photos by [illegible]

ing student achievement in writing. "I think of this as a teacher support group," explains program founder and director Larry Colton. "We change attitudes about writing—for teachers and kids."

Working in partnership with Portland Public Schools and Portland State University, COW gives teachers in grades three through 12 much more than a summer shot of inspiration. After the intensive workshop, where they hone their own writing skills with the help of people who write for a living, teachers can look forward to scheduling four guest writers for weeklong residencies with their students. Their schools get to host Family Write Nights, where kids and parents work together with a guest writer. Teachers receive $400 apiece to spend on books for their classrooms. And throughout the year, they have opportunities to get together with fellow participants, and recharge.

"It's hard to explain," says Ron Norman, a fifth-grade teacher with 25 years of classroom experience, "but it just feels good to be with this group. We get time to talk, to connect as professionals. That's valuable, and we get so little time during the school year to do that."

TEACHER AS WRITER

Like most of her colleagues, fourth-grade teacher Sue Wilcox is a busy person. "I work full time. I'm a mom with three kids. When am I ever going to sit down and write?"

The summer workshop gave Wilcox and her fellow teachers ample time to write. And revise. And read their stuff aloud. And then write some more, prompted and inspired by the parade of poets, novelists, and essayists who came to talk about their craft. "Not in 20 years have I had a chance to do this," says Wilcox, one of eight teachers from Laurelhurst Elementary School participating in COW under a special grant this year. "This program has reminded me of the value of being a writer myself. And it has reinforced for me that anybody can write. As a teacher, that's valuable to know."

Similarly, for fellow Laurelhurst teacher Ron Norman, the workshop provided an incentive to pick up his pen. "I don't write enough. I labor over my own writing. I get stuck on a choice of words. I tend to do all the things I tell my kids not to do," he admits. "This class forced me to write. And it reminded me how I throw stuff at my kids all the time. I'll tell them, I want five pieces finished by this date. Now I can see how hard that can be for them, because I've been tossed back in the classroom myself."

Community of Writers doesn't claim to have invented the "teacher as writer" model. It's an approach that's been used with success by the Bay Area Writing Project in Berkeley, California, since 1974, and by similar teacher training programs across the country, including several in the Northwest (see Writing Resources, Page 31).

Why should teachers care about improving their own writing skills? "Many teachers have not been trained how to write," believes Colton, who was a high school teacher before launching his own nonfiction writing career. Even teachers who have studied grammar and composition, he suspects, "have probably never focused on the writing process." Like most professional writers, Colton knows from experience that "the real work of writing starts with rewriting." That's one of the lessons teachers take to heart when they struggle to improve their own writing in the workshops.

Debbie Bradway, Principal of Wilcox Elementary, says the experiential learning that goes on during the summer "gives teachers a hook" for understanding writing. "It's not like sitting in lectures. They learn the process by doing it."

Norman, for instance, recalls turning in a draft of a first-person story for Colton's review. "He just tore it apart. And it was *bad*," Norman admits, "but he edited it in such a way that I was laughing while he did it. It needed so much work, and I was just going to junk it. But he convinced me to start in a different place, keep a chunk of it, get rid of another big chunk, and move forward. That was a lesson for me: to see how valuable the editing process can be, and to remember that you don't want to defeat your students when you work with them on revising."

Turning teachers into enthusiastic writers is just one component of Community of Writers. Equally important is bringing writers into the classroom and turning them loose to teach.

WRITER AS TEACHER

Nature writer Shelley Washburn opens her gig in Rebecca Erickson's class with a promise. "The rest of the week, I won't talk as much as I do today," she says. "You'll be doing stuff instead of listening to me."

But these fourth-graders aren't complaining. They're too busy listening, wide-eyed, as Washburn tantalizes them with a mystery she had to solve in order to write a story. Her challenge? "How could I describe an animal most people have never seen?"

As Washburn prowls the classroom, describing her field research to track down an elusive, nocturnal creature known to forestry folks as a "boomer," the students try to catch a glimpse of the photograph she holds tight to her torso. "It's not a nice picture," she warns them. "I'm sorry a dog killed this animal." Now the kids must have a look to gauge the gross-out factor for themselves. Washburn finally tips the photo their way, asking them to compare the boomer corpse with another animal readers might recognize. Using comparisons and analogies was how she solved her own writing challenge. The students suggest prairie dog, mole with a short tail, squirrel, small beaver with no tail—all apt comparisons, it turns out, to the animal more properly known as the mountain beaver. Within minutes of Washburn's arrival in the classroom, she has engaged students in her favorite exercise: capturing the natural world with words.

During her weeklong residency, Washburn uses a variety of teaching methods to help these fourth-graders become more keen at observation and more artful in their use of description. Before she ever asks them to write, she teaches them how to look. "Good writers—not just science writers—observe the world carefully," she explains. "Seeing, smelling, hearing, tasting, and touching all give us facts that good writers put into their writing."

Washburn hands out jewelers' loupes and asks students to look at, then draw, their magnified fingerprints and assorted objects from the natural world. Once they've looked closely and drawn huge enlargements on paper, they're ready to offer comparisons. Scribbling furiously, Washburn records their descriptions of fingerprints: whirlpool, bullseye, end of a skateboard, maze, swish of wind, monkey swinging through the jungle then dropping from a branch. "Do you have a class of poets?" Washburn asks, turning to the teacher. But Erickson doesn't hear at first. She's too busy studying her own fingerprints, learning to see.

Reflecting on the writer-in-the-classroom experience a few weeks later, Erickson says she came away with some fresh ideas to guide her classroom practice. "Taking time for observation, and describing objects in that much detail, was new for me. I'll keep finding ways to do that," she says. "And I liked how Shelley had kids share little snippets of their work while they were still writing. I've tended to wait until they're finished before asking them to read. She showed me the value of having them share just a beautiful phrase" from a work in progress. The guest residencies give teachers "a shot in the arm," Erickson says. "You pick up a couple new ideas or techniques. It's energizing."

Teachers say they appreciate the variety of genres and personalities on the COW roster. Norman chooses writers "to fill the holes I have. I feel like I'm weak in poetry," he says, so he's invited a poet for one of his classroom visits and a songwriting duo for another. He also likes how the professional writers—who receive training in how to work with students—reinforce what he's been doing in the classroom. One guest writer asked his students if they knew how to use similes and metaphors. Norman was thrilled. "We had just worked with those. I had assigned kids to pull examples of each from a novel we had read. This validated for the kids what I'd been working on with them. They could see, here's a real, live writer who uses metaphors. That's not just Mr. Norman's thing."

Wilcox had been working with her class on character development in the weeks leading up to a residency by writer Jennifer Lauck, whose memoir, *Blackbird*, will be published later this year. "Her whole approach to creativity was so different from anything I could have imagined," Wilcox says. The author had students start by creating the face of a trucker, then add details to flesh out the whole character. She had them list five things their character might carry in a pocket or purse, for instance, and tell why. If characters carried a cell phone, who did they call with it? By week's end, students had created notebooks, life histories, and even rubber stamps of their fully developed characters.

Wilcox participated right alongside her students: "I shared my writing with them—and I was as eager to share as they were! We were on equal terms, all working to become better writers."

SCHOOL AS COMMUNITY

Although all the teachers in COW get well acquainted during the summer session and occasional get-togethers, the eight from Laurelhurst Elementary who are participating this year have enjoyed a special bonding experience. "We've all had the same training. We all look at writing as an active process now. We talk more as peers, because we've made more connections. We share resources. It's created a real dialogue in this building about writing," says Wilcox.

While teachers are free to apply to COW individually, principals are starting to ask about involving their whole staff or a particular grade-level team. Generous grant support from community-based programs such as the Meyer Memorial Trust has helped the program grow. The summer workshop will expand this year to four separate weeks, to accommodate up to 120 teachers.

Bradway, who has five teachers from her eight-person faculty at Wilcox participating this year, says the program "gets the whole building jazzed about writing," including students, parents, and teachers. "In my 25 years of education," the principal adds, "this is one of the best [professional development] programs I've ever seen."

The roster of writers also continues to grow as word gets out about the program. It doesn't hurt with recruiting, Colton admits, that writers are paid for their time. Added value comes from stronger school-community ties. Writers who are active in the program often wind up being cheerleaders for the work that teachers do every day.

Theoretically, all this attention to developing teachers' skills should result in stronger student writing skills. To track the impact of COW, researchers from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory are assessing student writing samples at the start and end of the year. An earlier evaluation, conducted during the 1997-98 school year, showed a positive impact on both student achievement and teaching practice. Participating students wrote more, liked writing more, and became more competent writers. Teachers collaborated more with their peers, felt less isolated in the classroom, improved their own writing skills, and became more open to trying new methods of teaching writing, according to the NWREL evaluation.

But objective measurements—so important in this era of achievement, accountability, and writing assessments—will tell only part of the story of Community of Writers, predicts Laurelhurst Principal Teri Geist. Sometimes, growth happens in more subtle, less measurable ways. "Let's say you have a few kids who were at risk of needing remedial help at the start of the school year. A visiting sportswriter or poet might grab their interest or trigger a new way for them to approach writing. Maybe they get inspired and manage to write a clear paragraph. That's huge!" she says, for students, teachers, and all the rest of the community that celebrates writing. ■

WRITING RESOURCES

Professional development workshops that use the teacher-as-writer approach are offered throughout the region. Many programs are affiliated with the National Writing Project (NWP), which grew out of the successful Bay Area Writing Project. According to the *Catalog of School Reform Models*, NWP aims to improve the teaching of writing at all grade levels, improve professional development programs for teachers, and improve the professional standing of classroom teachers. NWP includes programs in 48 states. (Web site: www.gse.berkeley.edu/Research/NWP/nwp.html) Writing resources for teachers in the Northwest include:

ALASKA— Alaska State Writing Consortium, a nonprofit organization of Alaska school districts working together to promote and improve the teaching of writing in the state. Contact: 1108 F Street, Juneau, AK 99801. Phone: (907) 465-8754. (Web site: pec.jun.alaska.edu/aswcpage.html)

IDAHO— Northwest Inland Writing Project, based at the University of Idaho. Contact: College of Education, Division of Teacher Education, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID 83844. Phone: (208) 885-6586.

MONTANA— The Montana Writing Project, based at the University of Montana, trains teacher consultants to conduct writing workshops and inservice programs for teachers and school districts. Contact: Department of English, University of Montana, Missoula, MT 59812. Phone: (406) 243-2051. (Web site: www.umt.edu/english/mwp.htm)

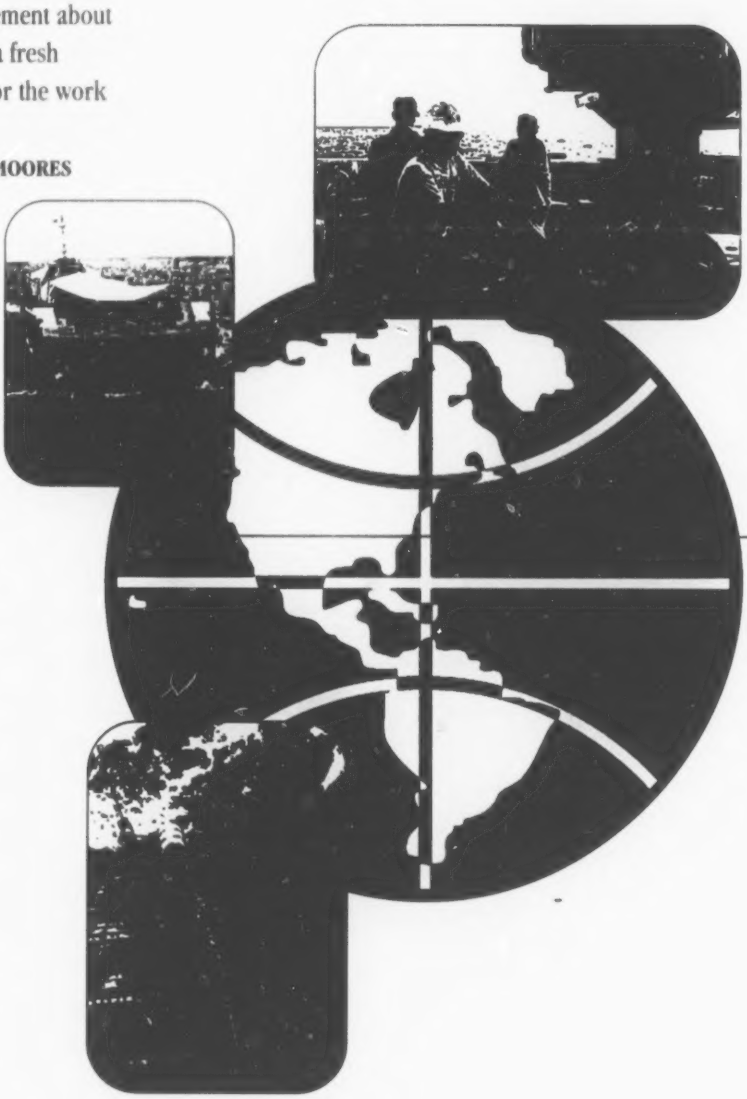
OREGON— Oregon Writing Project includes five campus sites around the state (University of Oregon, Eugene; Lewis & Clark College, Portland; Willamette University, Salem; Southern Oregon State College, Ashland; Eastern Oregon State College, La Grande). For contact information, see the Web site of the National Writing Project (www.gse.berkeley.edu/Research/NWP/network/states/Oregon.html). Community of Writers, a separate program, is sponsored by the Portland Public Schools Foundation. Contact: 1631 Northeast Broadway, PMB #121, Portland, OR 97232. Phone: (503) 493-1473.

WASHINGTON— Writing programs are offered on the campuses of Central Washington University, Ellensburg; Washington State University, Richland; and University of Washington, Seattle. For contact information, see NWP Web site (www.gse.berkeley.edu/Research/NWP/network/states/Washington.html)

HOW I SPENT MY VACATION

During the off-season, many teachers seek out experiences to deepen their own knowledge. They come back to the classroom with new ideas, renewed excitement about teaching, and a fresh appreciation for the work of learning.

By SAMANTHA MOORES



DOING REAL SCIENCE:

Montana's Richard Jones

How does a landlocked science teacher from Billings, Montana, get to spend two months aboard a research ship in the tropical Pacific? By filling out an application, of course. For Richard Jones, Montana's "Teacher at Sea," the answer is that simple.

As head of the science department at Billings Senior High, Jones, 38, keeps his eyes peeled for anything interesting that comes across his desk—applications, invitations, project bulletins. "I'll fill out anything," he confesses. "It can't hurt to try." After 10 years in the classroom, this intrepid teacher has learned that long shots often pay off.

Take his two months at sea aboard the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration research ship *Ka'imimoana*. As part of NOAA's Teacher at Sea program during the summer of 1998, Jones worked with researchers exploring the role of the tropical ocean in modifying the world's climate. The ship's crew deployed, recovered, and serviced deep-sea moorings that measure ocean currents, ocean temperature, and atmospheric variables throughout the equatorial Pacific. These measurements were transmitted in "real time" to the

NOAA Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory in Seattle and are available to researchers around the world working on a variety of climate studies, including El Niño research and weather prediction. In addition to the buoy operations, the ship measured upper-ocean currents, sea surface temperature, salinity, carbon dioxide content, Carbon 14 and chlorophyll, and upper-air atmospheric soundings. An ongoing census of barnacles and marine life that inhabit the recovered moorings was also conducted during the mission.

The project was a dream come true for Jones, who has won numerous teaching honors, including a Tandy "Champions of the Classroom" award and a 1996 Presidential Teaching Award in Secondary Sciences. Although his voyage was nearly two years ago, the rush he got from the trip is still fresh. "The experience was phenomenal. For a science teacher to actually get to *do* science is really rare," says Jones. "I think the kids respect you more when you have actually gone out and done the things you are teaching them about. It's more than just a lecture or a passage from a textbook."

After two months at sea, Jones returned to the classroom recharged and brimming with ideas for classroom projects. In his 11th- and 12th-grade physics classes, for example, Jones used a NOVA video on El Niño and the daily journal entries, digital photos, and data he collected during his trip to give students an indepth look at how research is conducted and findings are used to solve real-world problems. He also has kids involved in more inquiry-based learning projects, such as individual research exploring water consumption and population growth. Students use statistical sampling and mathematical modeling, and report their findings to the rest of the class.

Jones' students get more out of his travels than just interesting classroom projects. "When kids ask, 'Where is this ever going to apply?' I can cite dozens of examples," Jones explains. "I also use my experiences to teach a unit on cooperation and team building. Living on a ship, your life really depends on how well you work with other people. All of this is giving kids real-life connections to education, giving them access to more than just the four walls of the classroom."

The Teacher at Sea program also requires teachers to share their professional development experiences with other educators. Jones had to submit a report to NOAA's Education Office detailing the cruise events and providing ideas for classroom implementation; develop a mini-unit based on his experiences at sea; and either write an article for publication or make a presentation to colleagues at an educator's conference.

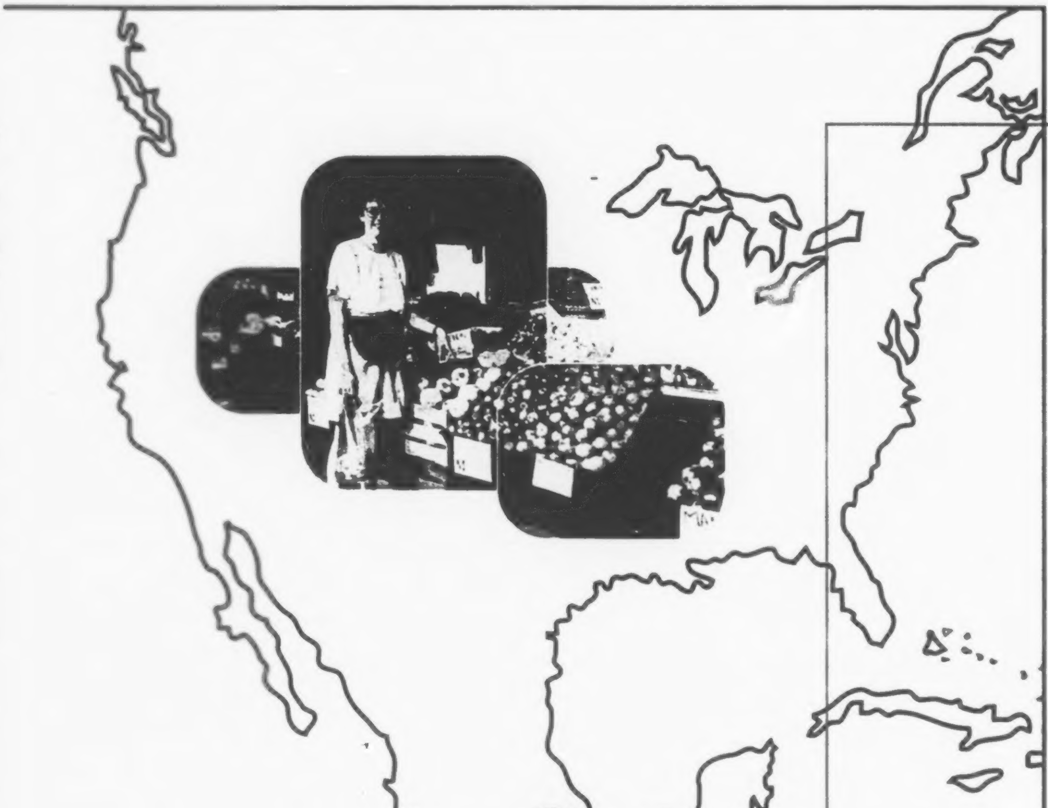
He chose to present at the National Science Teachers Convention in Boston last summer, and has also talked about the Teacher at Sea program at smaller, regional conferences.

Next up for Jones is a New Year's trip to Antarctica, where he will work alongside researchers through a program funded by the National Science Foundation. While there, he'll be online on a daily basis, checking in with his students and giving them project updates.

Several other teachers from the Northwest region have participated in NSF field projects, which send classroom teachers along on scientific expeditions to both the Arctic and Antarctic regions. A Vancouver, Washington, teacher camped near Kennicott Glacier in Alaska last summer, collecting data with a team of scientists. A high school teacher from Barrow, Alaska, sailed aboard a Coast Guard ice breaker, helping researchers analyze the chemistry and biology of ice in the Beaufort Sea.

NSF's program picks up all expenses, including the teacher's airfare and the cost of a substitute to cover his classroom. The investment can run as high as $14,000 per teacher. But as an NSF spokesperson told the *Anchorage Daily News*, "This is a small investment to bring actual research experiences to students in the classroom."

For Jones, the motivation is simple: "As teachers, we require our kids to learn new things, but we ourselves tend to slack off. We get comfortable in a job and get in a rut, teaching the same stuff year after year. I want to do something new every year."



BUILDING CULTURAL BRIDGES:

Washington's Cheryl Koenig

As a "perpetual student of Spanish," Cheryl Koenig is always looking for ways to bone up on her grammar and practice her conversational skills. Six years ago, this veteran teacher from Manson, Washington, spent a month in Cuernavaca, Mexico, soaking up the country's language and culture. Living with a Mexican family and spending six hours a day in intensive Spanish classes gave Koenig plenty of opportunities to grasp the subtleties of the local dialect and learn the proper use of the subjunctive. But the most valuable thing Koenig brought back from her summer abroad was a deeper understanding of her students at Manson Elementary.

Located in rural North Central Washington, Manson Elementary serves a growing Hispanic community. Lured by steady jobs in the area's orchards, packing sheds, and burgeoning tourism industry, migrant families from Mexico have steadily become permanent residents, causing the school's Hispanic population to explode by 350 percent since 1993. Today, close to 70 percent of Manson's 390 K-6 students are Hispanic, and nearly half have limited English ability.

"Visiting Mexico gave me a huge

understanding of where my kids are coming from—both them and their families," explains Koenig, 48, who has been teaching since 1973. "When the entire culture is new to you, and you don't understand what people are saying or what you're supposed to be doing, it is overwhelming. This helped me know what our students are going through."

With language barriers making the school's traditional curriculum ineffective for a growing number of students, connecting with kids and their families has taken on new importance at Manson over the past few years. Inspired by her trip, Koenig, who is also the school's Title VII grant coordinator for bilingual education, came up with an idea for a program where other teachers could study Spanish and travel to Mexico. The district and school board agreed to set aside money from the budget, and Manson's Spanish for Educators program was born.

Staff can participate in the program in two ways. During the summer, the district pays for an intense, 40-hour week of Spanish instruction for interested staff. Those who want to take classes on their own can do so; the district will pay for the classes, but it doesn't compensate them for their time. After completing 40 hours of Spanish instruction, staff are eligible to travel to Mexico for a two- or four-week program. Koenig looks for established study-abroad programs that offer college credit. In addition to Cuernavaca, teachers have visited Morelia, Mexico, through a program at Central Washington University. Many Manson families have come from both regions.

The program has three primary goals, according to Janet Cline, Director of State and Federal Programs for Manson School District:

- To have teachers experience the frustration, the breakthroughs, the progression of learning a second language
- To increase their Spanish skills
- To provide a sense for staff of where students come from

With effective professional development, notes Cline, "there is never a single thrust. It has to be many things, at many times, for many people. This program does that."

After five years, what keeps the program going strong? Flexibility is key. While the staff has enthusiastically welcomed these opportunities, sometimes interest and available dollars don't match up. New babies and other commitments meant that one summer no one could make the trip to Mexico; another year there wasn't enough money in the budget. By taking it one year at a time and accepting whatever commitment people are willing to give, the school is usually able to meet everyone's needs. This summer, for example, a Title VII bilingual grant is sending the six eligible staff members to Mexico. Some teachers, like Koenig, have even made repeat trips, and last year the school nurse, librarian, and counselor went, too. Eighteen people—about a third of Manson's staff—have visited Mexico so far. An additional 15 have participated in the weeklong summer Spanish course.

Teachers at Manson don't have to search to find other opportunities for staff development. Adopt-A-Family is a summer literacy and enrichment program that pairs paid staff members with families in need of one-on-one literacy support. About once a week, staff visit the family home to work on literacy activities. Last year the program culminated in a group field trip to Seattle, where a busload of students, parents, grandparents, siblings, teachers, and paraprofessionals visited the zoo and shared a picnic in a nearby park. Cline explains that while the program "is not really staff development in the usual sense," it does improve school climate and encourage communication between teachers and families.

Monday Madness, another activity funded by Title VII, takes place three Mondays a month throughout the school year. Staff spend an hour or two after school—they are paid $25 an hour—discussing such topics as Washington's assessment, teaching and learning strategies for bilingual students, and using technology to enhance teaching and learning.

While professional development is just one part of Manson's improvement plan, these programs seem to be making a difference. Student achievement levels have improved dramatically over the past five years, families are more involved in their children's education, and Manson was named a 1998-99 Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education. After 17 years at the school, Koenig has seen what these programs can do. "We used to be a disjointed staff," she admits. "This has really pulled us together." ■

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Continued from Page 7

WHAT HAMPERS GROWTH

Despite the consensus on what makes for effective professional development, relatively few of this country's 2.8 million public school teachers work in environments designed to foster ongoing adult learning. Stigler and Hiebert, who compared videotapes of teaching practices in the United States, Japan, and Germany, conclude that in this country, "Teachers work alone, for the most part, and have little time to interact, much less collaborate."

In addition to isolation, teachers fight the clock to fit in the demands of the day—leaving little time for the reflection or collaboration that have been proven to improve teaching skills and invigorate teachers. The greatest challenge to effective professional development, according to a 1996 ERIC Clearinghouse report, is a lack of time. *Teacher Quality* reports that typical professional development activities last from one to eight hours—the equivalent of a day or less.

Money also plays a role in whether teachers can afford to focus on their own skills. During lean budget times, even a paltry budget for staff development tends to be one of the first items to be trimmed. And wealthier schools typically have deeper pockets for professional development than schools in high-poverty settings, reports the Department of Education in *Promising Practices*, creating "a strong disincentive for teachers to choose schools in urban and rural areas." This inequity "denies development opportunities to the very teachers who face the most challenge."

A report released in December by the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) reveals that school districts spend less than 1 percent of their budgets on teacher training. NSDC urges districts to increase their professional development budgets to 7 percent—comparable to what for-profit businesses sink into training their workers. Further, NSDC recommends that 25 percent of teachers' time—two hours out of every eight—should be devoted to their own learning.

What shapes a good teacher? An Idaho veteran recalls an experience that had lasting impact: "A few years into my career, I was reassigned to a small school. Physically, we worked in an open space so we could all see each other. We could hear what was going on in one another's classes. There were no closed doors. For the first time, I had people nearby to coach me. Because I was willing to be critiqued, I was able to learn and grow. Being part of that cadre turned me into a real teacher."

MAKING A CAREER OF LEARNING

Kounaikenshuu, a Japanese term that has no easy translation in the English language, describes a process that is foreign to most American schools: school-based professional development that Japanese teachers engage in throughout their careers. As authors of *The Teaching Gap* explain: "In the United States, teachers are assumed to be competent once they have completed teacher-training programs. Japan makes no such assumption. Participation in school-based professional-development groups is considered part of the teacher's job in Japan." The groups provide a context in which teachers are mentored and trained by their peers, and also a laboratory for the development and testing of new teaching techniques.

Although the high achievement of Japanese students often captures headlines in this country, Japan's culture for improving teaching merits more attention from school reformers in the United States, suggest Stigler and Hiebert. "What is most impressive about Japan is that the culture genuinely values what teachers know, learn, and invent, and has developed a system to take advantage of teachers' ideas: evaluating them, adapting them, accumulating them into a professional knowledge base, and sharing them."

Making a career of learning starts with the recognition that "a teaching career is a continuum, not a series of disconnected steps stacked on top of each other," according to the U.S. Department of Education report, *Promising Practices*. "A professional career begins with recruitment, continues through preparation and initial licensing, and extends to lifelong development. Every stage in this continuum must be rigorous."

A recent study of nine successful schools—urban elementary schools where children of color living in poverty have achieved impressive academic results—makes a powerful case for supporting teachers so that they can support their students. *Hope for Urban Education*, researched by the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin and published in 1999 by the U.S. Department of Education, reports that these schools differ in such factors as demographics, reform model, grade configuration, and others. But they share key strategies, including two relating to teacher support: school leaders make sure that teachers have adequate materials, equipment, and professional development; and school leaders create opportunities for teachers to work, plan, and learn together around instructional issues. As a result, the authors conclude, "educators in the nine schools exhibited a true sense of professionalism. They worked together (often on a daily basis) to improve their teaching and enhance student learning."

One of the report's key recommendations: more support for "high-quality, school-based professional development that dramatically increases the amount of time that educators spend working with and learning from each other."

In *Actual Schools, Possible Practices*, Novick stresses the critical role of the principal in creating a school environment that promotes ongoing teacher growth. "Collaborative inquiry can only thrive in a climate of mutual respect and interdependence," she writes. An effective school leader can make that climate more favorable by encouraging teachers to examine their classroom practices and beliefs, and structuring the school day so that teachers have time to devote to their own development as professionals. Schools that have been recognized by the Department of Education for model professional development tend to have strong principals. According to the authors of *Islands of Hope in a Sea of Dreams*, "Teachers need strong principals to support them, guide them, maintain a focus on the desired results, protect them from competing demands, and hold them on course."

The right questions can often help teachers advance their own learning. Novick highlights four broad topics worthy of ongoing inquiry and reflection:

- **Examining current practice:** What does my teaching look like? Why do I work this way?
- **Setting priorities:** Are my practices consistent with what is known about how people learn? Am I aware of alternative models of teaching?
- **Creating an optimal learning environment:** What learning experiences are essential? What assessments are appropriate?
- **Expanding teacher knowledge through classroom research:** What dilemmas, questions, or concerns about teaching and learning do I want to explore? How can I collaborate more with my colleagues? How will I share my research?

– *Raised by two teacher-parents in Montana, the young woman has always known she wanted to spend her career in the classroom. But now that she has a class of her own to lead, she hears a nagging voice, asking: "Will I be able to do it all? Will I be good enough? Will I find time to teach all that my students need, and teach it all effectively?"*

SETTING THE STANDARD

Just as the standards movement has defined what students should know and be able to do, a national effort is underway to distill the essence of good teaching. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), established in 1987, has developed a rigorous process to encourage teachers to look critically at their own performance and determine what they can do to be better at their job. National Board certification, the gold standard of teaching credentials, takes several months and requires applicants to take exams and submit a portfolio of videotapes, lesson samples, journals, essays, and other documentation of classroom and collegial work.

Although voluntary national certification has earned praise from Secretary of Education Richard Riley and President Clinton, among others, states have responded with varying degrees of support. Some states pay all or part of the $2,000 application fee, or reward certified teachers with bonuses or permanent salary increases. Others offer no incentives.

Even states where teachers have been slow to pursue national certification can benefit from the work that the National Board has done to define good teaching. These five essential ingredients of good teaching that NBPTS has identified support the link between professional development and student success:

- **Teachers are committed to students and their learning.** They make knowledge accessible to all students by adjusting their teaching to student abilities, skills, and backgrounds.
- **Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.** They are aware of students' prior knowledge and preconceptions and can create multiple ways of acquiring knowledge.
- **Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.** They draw upon a variety of instructional strategies and know how to engage students in learning; they use multiple ways of measuring student growth.
- **Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.** They evaluate their teaching, seek advice from others, and integrate research into their practice.
- **Teachers are members of learning communities.** They work collaboratively with colleagues and with parents and use school and community resources for their students.

An Alaska teacher uses the hallway outside her classroom to display student projects and, she hopes, pique her colleagues' curiosity. "Everyone doesn't have time to attend workshops and find out how to do multimedia projects," she admits, "but I'm so eager to share what I've learned. I get excited when another teacher asks if our classes can do a big project together. It usually winds up better than what either of us could do alone."

NORTHWEST TRENDS

Although all five states in the Northwest scored poorly in *Quality Counts 2000* on efforts to improve teacher quality, there are plenty of spots in the region where promising approaches are underway. No one model is being used consistently to develop teachers' classroom skills. The district in Edmonds, Washington, winner of a 1999 professional development award from the Department of Education, doesn't use a model at all. Instead, the district's teachers approach staff development more philosophically, as a way of working together to improve instruction.

Around the region, professional development efforts—whether organized at individual schools, by districts, states, or regional consortia—share an underlying belief in teachers' capacity to grow and learn throughout their careers. Other hallmarks include:

- **Collaboration**—In Montana, three districts located within the Flathead Indian Reservation have overcome the challenge of geography by pooling resources for professional development. The Mission Valley Consortium is built on the premise that conversation, reflection, and continuous improvement are essential for effective staff development, Novick reports in *Actual Schools, Possible Practices*. Teams made up of representatives from each school review research in such areas as cognition, school culture, and leadership. The consortium has sponsored study groups, workshops, and courses for credit. Similarly, in Salem, Oregon, 13 school districts and the Willamette Education Service District have formed a consortium for professional development and school improvement. The Willamette Curriculum Coalition recruits teacher leaders from throughout the region to provide collegial, interactive professional development related to Oregon's standards-based learning and assessment system.

- **Teachers of teachers**—Teachers from all corners of Alaska have a chance to deepen their understanding of technology and share their learning with other teachers through an ambitious program called ARCTIC (for Alaska Reform in the Classroom through Technology Integration and Collaboration). The five-year professional development project, a Technology Innovation Grant Project funded by the U.S. Department of Education, is designed to improve the way teachers teach and students learn by using technology as a tool for classroom change. Montana, also through a Technology Innovation Grant, has launched a collaborative project between a dozen schools and the University of Montana. Montana TALES (Teaching and Learning in Every School) trains teams of teachers to integrate technology into classroom instruction. Teams then use technology with students, K-12, to research and relate multimedia "tales" that reflect local culture, history, legends, and traditions. Having teachers lead projects in their own buildings is having a snowball effect, with staff interest in integrating technology expanding across all disciplines.
- **Growing professionalism**—In Washington, the Northwest Initiative for Teaching and Learning (NWIFTL) is attempting to build a collaborative, reflective school culture through long-term professional development. A partnership that includes four school districts, two universities, the state superintendent of public instruction, and organizations such as the Washington Education Association, NWIFTL is researching the relationship between professional development and student learning. Creating time for teachers to reflect and collaborate at the building level boosts professionalism through such building-based projects as faculty study groups, peer coaching, and grade-level teams focusing on specific content areas.

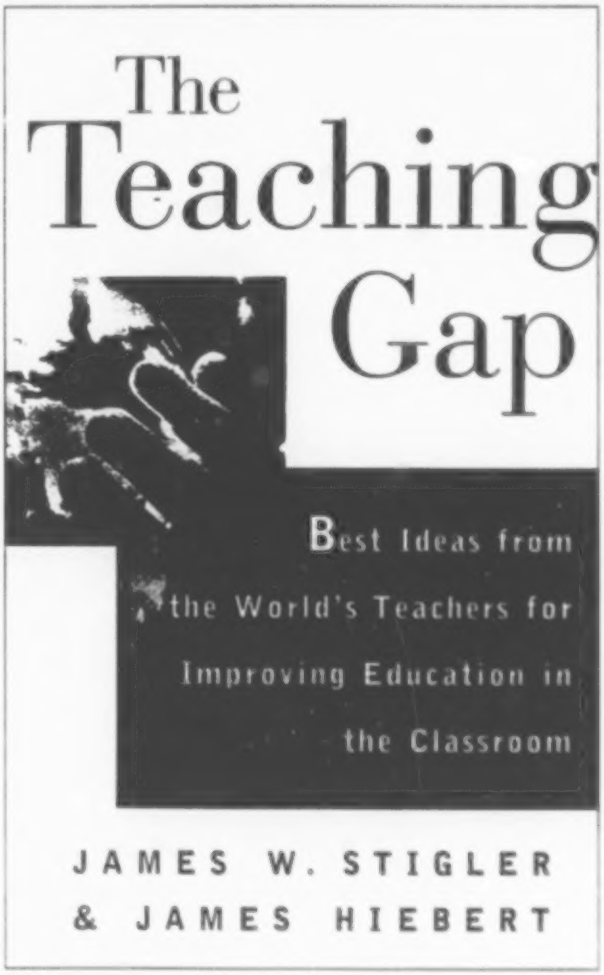
At a Washington school, one teacher remembers how she felt the first time a peer coach asked to visit her class. "I wondered, was she coming in to judge me? Would she think I couldn't do my job? I was pretty reluctant. We older teachers were used to closing our classroom doors and doing our own thing. But I took a chance, invited her in, and watched her model a reading lesson with my kids. She had such high energy and was so knowledgeable. I saw my kids respond. I was so excited—and suddenly, eager to improve myself. She and I wound up team teaching, sharing ideas and building on each other's strengths. Teaching has become so much more fun. I'm not alone anymore." ■

ONLINE RESOURCES

- *Doing What Matters Most* can be downloaded from the Web site of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (www.tc.colmbia.edu/~teachcomm/)
- *Journal of Staff Development* is available at the online library of National Staff Development Council (www.nsdc.org/educatorindex.htm)
- National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (www.nbpts.org/nbpts/)
- Northwest Initiative for Teaching and Learning (www.nwiftl.org/)
- *Promising Practices: New Ways to Improve Teacher Quality* (www.ed.gov/pubs/PromPractice/)
- *Quality Counts 2000*, the 50-state report by *Education Week* (www.edweek.org/sreports/qc00)

IN THE LIBRARY

WITH THE INCREASING national focus on teacher quality, professional development is receiving plenty of attention from education researchers and writers. In their 1998 booklet, *High-Quality Professional Development*, NWREL authors Kit Peixotto and Jennifer Fager report that, since 1978, more than 5,600 citations related to professional development have been catalogued by the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC). Here's a look at a few of the most recent studies, books, and other resources.


The Teaching Gap

Best Ideas from the World's Teachers for Improving Education in the Classroom

JAMES W. STIGLER & JAMES HIEBERT

THE TEACHING GAP (The Free Press, 1999) draws on research gathered during the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) to provide a fascinating comparison of classroom practices in Japan, Germany, and the United States. James Stigler, a psychology professor who directed the TIMSS, and coauthor James Hiebert, an education professor, argue that American education will finally be reformed by improving the culture of teaching, not by recruiting better teachers.

Drawing from videotaped classroom lessons in the three countries, they point out deep-seated cultural differences, much more profound than differences between individual teachers in any single country. "We began to see something that surprised us," they write. "The systems of teaching within each country look similar from lesson to lesson." They go on to identify "scripts" for teaching in each country that "appear to rest on a relatively small and tacit set of core beliefs about the nature of the subject, about how students learn, and about the role that a teacher should play in the classroom."

Rather than pushing for wholesale reform of schools in this country, the authors make a case for "small, cumulative improvements" that will improve the culture of teaching. They outline six principles for improvement, namely:

- Expect improvement to be continual, gradual, and incremental
- Maintain a constant focus on student learning goals
- Focus on teaching, not teachers
- Make improvements in context
- Make improvement in the work of teachers
- Build a system that can learn from its own experience

***TEACHER QUALITY**: A Report on the Preparation and Qualifications of Public School Teachers*, released in January 1999 by the National Center for Education Statistics, starts from the premise that "good teachers are the hallmark" of a sound educational system, "integral to children's intellectual and social development." The report examines the quality of the nation's teachers from two broad perspectives: teacher preparation and qualifications; and teaching practices. The two elements are related, the study notes: "Excellent teacher preparation and qualifications should lead to exemplary teaching behaviors and practices."

By surveying full-time public school teachers about their preservice and continued learning as well as their work environments, *Teacher Quality* uncovers key areas in which teachers feel less than well prepared. These areas include integrating education technology, teaching culturally diverse students or students with limited English proficiency, and using student performance assessment techniques. When surveyed about the value of ongoing professional development, teachers report greater satisfaction with long-term training, mentoring, and collaborative opportunities than with short-term workshops.

To order a copy of *Teacher Quality*, call the U.S. Department of Education toll free at 1-877-4ED-PUBS.

***WHAT WORKS IN THE MIDDLE**: Results-Based Staff Development* by Joellen Killion, published in 1999 by the National Staff Development Council (NSDC), describes promising programs for boosting middle school student learning in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. The book is the result of a two-year NSDC study, supported by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, to identify staff development programs that have succeeded in raising student achievement in core academic areas.

NWREL's 6 + 1 Trait Writing Assessment™ model is one of 25 programs featured in detail in the book. Some 500 programs were nominated for consideration, and a national panel of experts winnowed the field, based on evidence of improved student achievement and other factors. The 6 + 1 Trait model helps teachers become more competent, confident assessors of student writing.

Copies of *What Works in the Middle* can be ordered for $30 from the NSDC online bookstore (www.nsdc.org/bookstore/books htm), or by phone, (512) 523-6029. NSDC's Web site (www.nsdc.org) is an excellent resource for staying current on trends, promising approaches, and new publications in the field of staff development.

ACTUAL SCHOOLS
POSSIBLE PRACTICES

ACTUAL SCHOOLS, POSSIBLE PRACTICES: *New Directions in Professional Development* (March 1999), by Dr. Rebecca Novick of NWREL's Child and Family Program, examines the role of effective professional development in elementary school reform. The booklet synthesizes academic research, recounts trends in education, shares understandings from developmental psychology, highlights promising practices, and relates the results of a survey of Northwest educators on the topic of professional development.

In a school climate that supports true reform, Novick writes, "everyone involved will be both a teacher and a learner." She cautions that turning schools into learning communities will require changes at the very core of education, and outlines barriers such as time and funding, bureaucratic structures, evaluation practices, and personal resistance to change.

Actual Schools, Possible Practices delivers on its title by describing the ambitious, ongoing reform efforts at Cherry Valley Elementary School in Polson, Montana. For a decade, this school has worked to create a community that supports children's learning. Staff development practices include time for collaboration, planning, reading, discussion, visiting other schools, and peer mentoring.

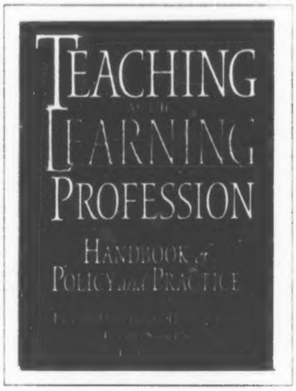
The publication costs $9.15 and can be ordered through NWREL's Document Reproduction Service. Phone: (503) 275-9519.

AS A STEP TOWARD improving their own classroom practices, teachers from Edmonds, Washington, teamed up to research different models of professional development. The result—an 82-page research synthesis called "Professional Development: Best Practices"—uses accessible language to outline general concepts as well as generic models that can be adapted to fit individual schools. Not only is the material well researched, but it carries the scent of success: The Edmonds District was the winner of a U.S. Department of Education Model Professional Development award last year. (See related story, Page 16.)

The Edmonds educators distill research concepts into practical tips, such as the qualities of a good staff development model and best practices for follow-ups to training. They also highlight the qualities of leadership to support staff development, examine strategies for working with adult learners, and identify factors that motivate or prevent change.

The section of the report that focuses on models provides a question-and-answer overview of nine applications, including study groups, mentors, and distance learning. Each section organizes information under such useful headings as "How do you do it?", "Where has it worked?", and "What are the pros and cons?"

Copies of the report are available for $20 each. To order, contact Susanne Lyon, Edmonds School District, 20420 68th Avenue, W. Lynnwood, WA 98036. Or call: (425) 670-7150.



TEACHING AS THE LEARNING PROFESSION: *Handbook of Policy and Practice* (Jossey-Bass, 1999), edited by Linda Darling-Hammond and Gary Sykes, includes essays from leading thinkers and researchers in education, exploring both policy and practice relating to what, and how, teachers learn. The focus throughout the book remains squarely on teachers, as Lee Shulman, President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, explains: "The more we learn from empirical studies of school reform ... the more irreplaceable classroom teachers turn out to be. ... Although there may be curricula that strive to prescribe teachers' behavior with great precision, for most teachers a typical day is fraught with surprises. ... Their work cannot be controlled by rules, even though it must be governed by standards."

Covering a wide expanse of issues—such as teacher education, ongoing professional development, schools as sites for teacher learning, and policy-related issues in teacher learning—the book is grounded in the real life of the classroom. Comments from teachers are used liberally to illustrate research-based concepts. One chapter, "Investing in Teacher Learning" by Richard F. Elmore and Deanna Burney, provides a detailed case study of New York City's Community School District 2, which enjoys a growing reputation for school improvement through professional development.

In a chapter on "The Essentials of Effective Professional Development," authors Willis D. Hawley and Linda Valli describe "an almost unprecedented consensus ... on ways to increase the knowledge and skills of educators substantially." The new consensus, the authors report, calls for collegial opportunities for staff learning linked to actual student performance. Synthesizing recent research, they identify these eight characteristics of effective professional development:

- Using goals and student performance to define what educators need to learn
- Involving teachers in identifying what they need to learn to increase their motivation and commitment
- Basing professional development at school
- Providing opportunities for collaborative problem solving
- Making professional development continuous and ongoing
- Making professional development information-rich
- Providing theoretical understanding by making research accessible to teachers
- Integrating professional development with comprehensive school change

EDUTOPIA, a newsletter published twice yearly by the George Lucas Educational Foundation, promotes innovative efforts to improve K-12 education through the integration of technology with teaching and learning. Stories tend to focus on schools that are using interactive media to enliven the learning process. Professional development of teachers is also a consistent theme. Recent issues, for instance, have focused on teachers who serve as technology mentors for their colleagues, a university partnership project to train new teachers in San Francisco public schools, and personal reflections from a leading education expert about the principal who helped her survive her first year in the classroom a quarter-century ago. Resource listings steer teachers toward help available in print, audio, video, and multimedia formats.

Print subscriptions are available at no charge. *Edutopia* is also published online (www.glef.org). For more information, contact the George Lucas Educational Foundation, P.O. Box 3494, San Rafael, CA 94912, or call (415) 507-0499.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
LEARNING FROM THE BEST
NCREL

WHAT CAN WE LEARN from schools and districts that have won national recognition for their approach to professional development? Plenty, according to *Professional Development: Learning from the Best*, a new publication designed to help schools plan and implement effective programs by drawing inspiration from winners of the National Award for Model Professional Development.

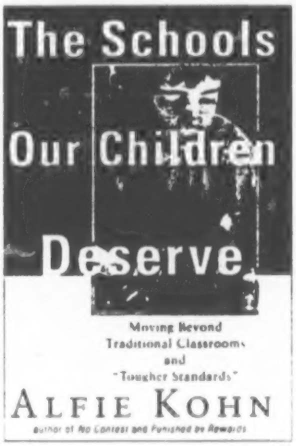
Written by Emily Hassel and published by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, the toolkit-style booklet distills best practices from the first 20 winners of the U.S. Department of Education award. The winners, recognized between 1997 and 1999, represent a wide range of schools: urban, rural, and suburban; traditional and innovative; diverse and homogenous; schools with tremendous financial resources and schools with very little "extra." As Hassel promises readers, "chances are very good that one or more of the award winners is similar to you in many respects."

The 71-page toolkit takes readers through a step-by-step process to design, implement, and evaluate a program for staff development. Checklists and other planning tools highlight key points to consider, while general themes and specific examples from award winners bring in ideas from the real world.

Schools embarking on a new approach to professional development should benefit from the section of the toolkit that addresses goals. Award winners set clear goals of two types: lofty principles or beliefs that serve as guideposts; and nitty-gritty, measurable objectives usually driven by specific student learning goals. Although winners' goals vary somewhat, the toolkit reports, all of them share the following:

- Improve all students' learning
- Improve teacher effectiveness
- Set high standards for teachers
- Promote continuous staff learning
- Enhance staff intellectual and leadership capacity

In limited numbers, free copies of *Professional Development: Learning from the Best* are available from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. To order, call NWREL's Document Reproduction Service at (503) 275-9519.


The Schools Our Children Deserve
Moving Beyond Traditional Classrooms and "Tougher Standards"
ALFIE KOHN
Author of No Contest and Punished by Rewards

ALFIE KOHN, known for previous books on provocative topics such as competition and rewards, takes on high-stakes testing and the educational standards movement in his latest work, *The Schools Our Children Deserve: Moving Beyond Traditional Classrooms and "Tougher Standards"* (Houghton Mifflin, 1999).

Kohn makes a case for replacing traditional teaching with more progressive classroom practices that foster creativity and curiosity in children. Buttressing his arguments with research, classroom observation, and the ideas of thinkers such as John Holt, Alfred North Whitehead, and Howard Gardner, Kohn argues that the standards movement "tends to favor *Old-School teaching*, the sort of instruction that treats kids as though they were inert objects, that prepares a concoction called 'basic skills' or 'core knowledge' and then tries to pour it down children's throats."

Instead of transmitting specific facts in order to boost test results, schools would better serve their students and communities by nurturing children's innate drive to find meaning in the world, Kohn argues. In a few broad strokes he paints the elements of better schools: "In place of superficial facts, we emphasize deep understanding. In place of fragmentation, we seek to integrate; we bring together skills, topics, and disciplines in a meaningful context. In place of student passivity and isolation, we value learning that is both active and interactive."

Good teachers, Kohn argues, see their job as providing the right conditions for learning. "They devise challenges and, if necessary, help illuminate for students what's interesting about those challenges. Sometimes they offer guidance and criticism, directions, and suggestions—and sometimes they keep their mouths shut." A chapter on "Education at Its Best" describes effective practices such as project-based learning, open-ended problem solving, cooperative learning, and teaching that probes for deeper understanding.

Such student-centered approaches require a special set of teacher skills. "Any kind of teaching that's more rigorous and demanding of students is likely to be so for teachers, too," Kohn admits. "One has to make a concerted, courageous effort to dispense with the textbooks and grade books, the teacher-directed lessons and the assumptions that math must be separated from social studies."

The book closes with what Kohn calls a "visitor's guide" to the classroom, highlighting the details parents should see as promising signs (eager, engaged student faces; a teacher who works the whole room; walls covered with students' projects; room overflowing with "purposeful clutter"), as well as possible reasons to worry (teacher's voice is the loudest or most often heard; walls displaying student assignments that are "suspiciously flawless"; reliance on textbooks and worksheets).

—*Suzie Boss*

Respect

Continued from Page 44

and problem solving. What makes it hard for teachers to improve their craft is that many parents, journalists, and public officials are nervous, if not hostile toward the best kind of instruction. Either they don't recognize it, or they are misinformed about its implications and the research supporting it. Or, they figure that if kids are having such a good time, they can't be learning.

NW: As you point out, it takes more skill on the teacher's part to help children be active learners, right?

KOHN: It takes a lot more skill to help children think for themselves than it does just to give them information.

NW: Which leads us back to professional development. How can schools use their time and resources in a way that will lead to better practices in the classrooms?

KOHN: Effective staff development sessions help some teachers reflect on how they can move in the right direction, and help others realize that they're on the right track already. It's important to remember that you can't compel people to learn. You can't compel students if they aren't motivated to get it. Similarly, incarcerating teachers in an auditorium for a mandatory inservice day is likely to generate resentment or at least resignation as people sit in back rows and work crossword puzzles.

NW: What about motivating those teachers who aren't yet motivated to examine their practices?

KOHN: The more a given teacher needs to hear something, the less likely that person will voluntarily show up at the event. That's the damning paradox of staff development.

NW: You've spoken about inviting teachers into staff development opportunities in a way that's more respectful. What would that look like?

KOHN: You can appeal to teachers' long-term goals for their students. You might say, if you want your kids to be interested in science or think like an historian or get hooked on making sense of ideas, then let's take a look at what you've been doing in the classroom. Let's compare that to what else might be available. To have any chance of succeeding, it will take an enormous amount of delicacy and skill and respect on the part of those inviting the teachers to reconsider their methods.

NW: What about the teachers who agree to reconsider how they teach?

KOHN: It takes a fair amount of gumption their part. You're asking them to confront the fact that they may not have been doing things as well as they could—for years. That can be hard to acknowledge. Many teachers will defensively and defiantly pull themselves up and say, I'm a very good teacher, thank you very much. And that's the end of the discussion. You need to give them ongoing support and coaching.

NW: Are there structural changes schools can make to better support teachers?

KOHN: Yes. We can restructure what happens in schools so that teachers are able to be in and out of each others' classrooms. Both the observer and the observed can learn from this process, and it's not construed as an intimidating evaluation session. There also has to be time for teachers to get together and talk about their craft. We need a culture created from the top down that values and encourages the admission of fallibility. That's what will allow teachers to say to their peers, 'I don't know what to do with this kid.' Or, 'I feel like I've reached a dead end in my teaching.'

NW: So asking for help isn't a signal of failure?

KOHN: Right now, experienced teachers assume they're supposed to know what to do. New teachers want to pretend competence. The result is that, individually, people feel too vulnerable to say out loud that they could use some help.

NW: And changing that culture—so that teachers are more free to ask for help, and have time to carry on discussions with their colleagues—will help students learn?

KOHN: I remember a class I had one year that was very difficult. I assumed the kids got together at night to figure out ways to make my life a living hell. I didn't realize until years later that the problem wasn't that the kids were trying to make me miserable. They were trying to make the time pass faster. When I think about the curriculum I was using —full of stuff like, "Our Friend the Adverb" and "Meet Mister Semicolon"—I can't blame them for acting out. But no one ever invited me to think about throwing away that god-awful text or my drill-and-skill assumptions about how learning happens. I didn't understand the connection until years later, when I observed the classrooms of talented, skilled practitioners. If there is a common characteristic of the very best classrooms, it is that kids are taken seriously. Superb teachers strive constantly to imagine how things look from the child's point of view.

Education Now and in the Future will [illegible] participants two days of interactive, skill-building sessions designed to inspire and educate. The conference aims to improve the skills and performance of practitioners who can positively affect student learning and outcomes. Check out the conference Web site at www.nwrel.org/comm/enf/. E-mail questions to enf@nwrel.org, or call NWREL at (503) 275-9500.

And for more information about Alfie Kohn's research, visit his Web site at www.alfiekohn.org. ■

Start with Respect

Conference keynoter highlights what helps, hinders good teaching

By SUZIE BOSS

When he was a young teacher, Alfie Kohn remembers "being left to my own devices" to seek out opportunities for professional development that might improve his classroom skills. Back then, he admits, "if an administrator had asked me, 'How's everything going? Anything you need?'—which no one ever did—I wouldn't even have known enough to ask the right questions."

More recently, as an author of seven books on education and human behavior, Kohn, 42, has sharpened his thinking on what will help teachers improve their craft so that they can help children learn to think for themselves. But as this nationally known advocate for child-centered education cautions, "The best kind of staff development is very difficult to sustain and sometimes even impossible to begin when the imperative is higher test scores."

Kohn will have a chance to expand on these thoughts this fall when he is the keynote speaker for Education Now and in the Future, a two-day conference focusing on professional development. Sponsored by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory and scheduled for October 30-31 in Portland, Oregon, Education Now and in the Future will showcase the latest in research and good practices for educators from throughout the region. As a preview, Kohn spoke recently with *Northwest Education* about some of the implications of his research.

NORTHWEST EDUCATION: Your latest book, *The Schools Our Children Deserve: Moving Beyond Traditional Classrooms and "Tougher Standards"* (Houghton Mifflin, 1999), makes a powerful case for changing classroom practices so that children will be more avid, active learners. But aren't you asking a lot from teachers?

ALFIE KOHN: Real change may take a generation. As Dewey pointed out, teachers don't necessarily teach the way they were taught to teach. Rather, they teach the way they were taught. We need a cohort of students taught in better, nontraditional classrooms who will eventually become teachers themselves. In the meantime, there are things we can do—and things we can stop doing—as a way to promote better instruction.

NW: What approach is likely to help teachers develop better classroom skills?

KOHN: You can't take even good ideas and shove them down the throats of teachers, because they'll just cough them back. But we can issue an invitation that's respectful and collaborative and appeals to teachers' long-term goals for their students.

NW: What needs to stop?

KOHN: Above all, we need to stop confusing better learning with higher test scores. The extent to which we conflate those two and demand better results on dreadful tests is the extent to which experimentation with more rigorous and engaging kinds of teaching is stopped in its tracks. It's not that standardized test scores are partial or inadequate measures of meaningful teaching and learning. They are often inversely related to meaningful teaching and learning. Every hour that teachers have to spend preparing kids to take standardized tests is an hour not spent improving their craft and helping kids to become critical, creative, curious thinkers.

NW: What happens to teaching when the focus shifts to standardized test scores?

KOHN: You have to ask what's been abandoned in the classroom in order to raise scores. Are students spending their time doing practice tests or more multiple-choice exercises and worksheets? Is there less time in class for following kids' questions and interests? Is it difficult for teachers to build a sense of community, allow for creative play, or develop their students' conflict resolution skills because those things aren't on the test? Raising the scores may be ruining the schools.

NW: Your new book contrasts what you call "Old School," traditional education with more progressive classroom practices. What's the difference?

KOHN: Traditional education is based on treating kids as passive receptacles into which a "bunch o'facts" is poured. Traditional teaching methods teach students to memorize facts and definitions, and have skills "drilled into" them. It's a process that relies on getting the child to listen to lectures, read textbooks, and, often, practice skills by completing worksheets. This approach prevents kids from connecting ideas, exploring deeply, and finding what they're doing important enough to pursue.

NW: So the more progressive approach is about helping children learn to think for themselves?

KOHN: A nontraditional or progressive classroom is a place where a community of learners engages in discovery and invention, reflection

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identify places where good things are happening,
provide descriptions of effective techniques being used,
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